8000 PLUS

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE

AMSTRAD

PCW 8256 • 8512

ISSUE 1 ● OCTOBER 1986 ● £1.25

THE NEW AMSTRAD PC

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LOCOSCRIPT WALLCHART

Muddled by the menus? See centre pages

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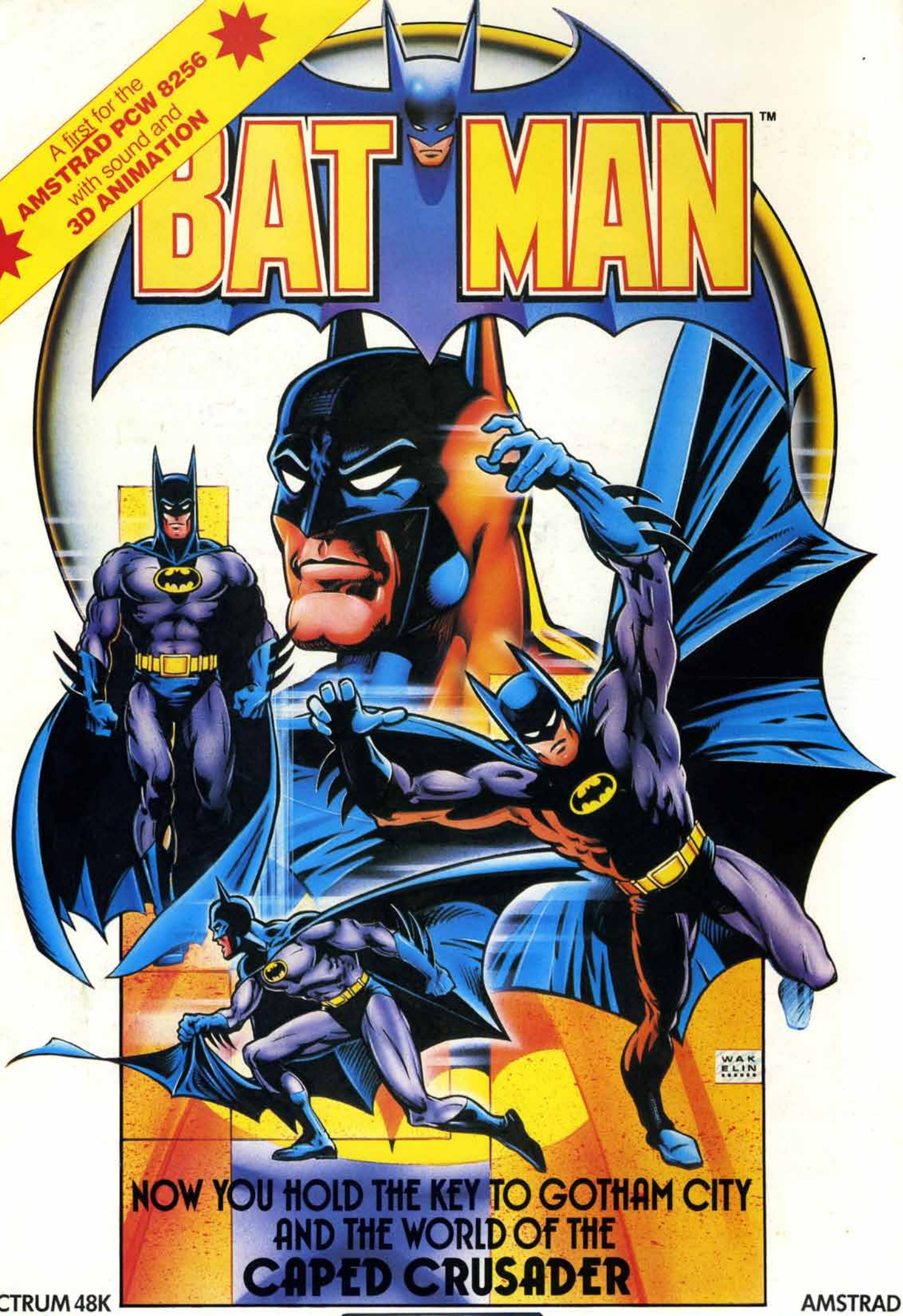

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You've just picked up a magazine which could permanently alter your relationship with your computer!

8000 PLUS

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In which we, the magazine's creators, murmur modestly about how wonderful a publication this will be.

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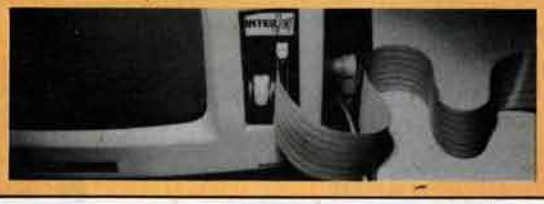
10 8256 UPGRADE
You can turn your machine into MORE than an 8512. Our feature explains how.



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One of LocoScript's big drawbacks is that it lacks the ability to automate personalised mailouts. Four companies including Locomotive Software themselves have now released packages to put that right. But which is best?

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One of the biggest decisions you'll make is how to go about computerising your accounts. Don't miss our six-page guide on the four main packages.

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Whether it's making back ups or using the M drive to its full potential, CP/M can help you. We point the way.

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Don't be fooled by lesser imitations – this one's the real thing. You won't know how you managed without it.

79 THE GOOD SOFTWARE FILE
To our knowledge this is the first comprehensive guide to the growing range of software available for Amstrad PCWs. It provides a sharp, concise evaluation of ALL the packages we consider most significant. Whether you're looking for spreadsheets or space invaders your search should start here.

90 SAVE A FORTUNE!
We present sizzling launch offers on the range of Caxton software. Not to mention Infocom adventures. And the remarkable *Batman*.

93 TIPOFFS
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97 ANSWERS PLEASE
The obligatory issue 1 questionnaire in which you tell us 8000 plus ways in which the magazine could be improved.

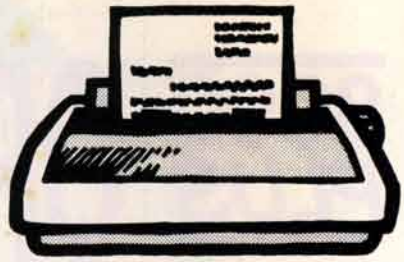
PC PLUS
Read all about the amazing new
AMSTRAD PC
Our special supplement starts on P49.

NEWWORD

When you want to address an external printer or modem from your PCW - and get at those extra features only available from a heavyweight wordprocessing system, then NewWord is your solution. Its industry-standard Wordstar-like commands sequences will provide you with a transportable skill that is readily upgraded to take advantage of NewWord3 on 16 bit MSDOS, PCDOS, and CCPM systems.

NewWord's notable benefits are:

1. Undelete buffer to avoid accidental erasure
2. Margin and format control can be saved with the document
3. Expanded help and prompt information
4. Custom print options can be inserted and saved with documents
5. 45,000 word English spell check system bundled free
6. Mailmerge with conditional operations is *built-in*, not a separate program.
7. Numerous printers supported without re-installation processes
8. 7 bit data file creation for MODEMs and program editing
9. Create your own simple mailmerge datafile input templates using NewWord itself
10. Multiuser, network and site licenses available for all versions.



NEWWORD 2 £ 69.00
NEWWORD 3 £249.00

NEWSPOOL
NEWMAIL
NEWTAG
NEWSEARCH
NEWFILE

NewSpool £19.95

PCW8256/8512 CPM Users: why wait for your printer? NewSpool will allow you to queue print jobs as background tasks, while you carry on typing in the foreground. Multiple jobs may be spooled - and it carries on even when you exit the program.

NewMail £29.95

A straightforward mailing list manager specifically for LocoMail and NewWord users. NewMail menu, creates, sorts, selects and manages mailing lists more quickly and simply than any database we've yet seen. Used in conjunction with the powerful conditional merge commands of NewWord, NewMail provides everything the mailing list user requires - including a simple label print option.

NewTag £14.95

Give your NewWord or Wordstar textfiles a meaningful plain language reference with this indexing utility. By embedding special double dot comments in your text, NewTag will scan and list these comments, showing the filename and user area. Use as many comment lines as you want, and never be stuck wondering what was in the file called MNFTE.DOC. (Mongolian Nose FluTEs of course!) You can also print the index for a handy hardcopy reference.

NewSearch £14.95

Search all the text files on all your disks for up to 10 keywords that will help find that file whose name has been forgotten! If you need to find that document containing the phrase "mongolian nose flutes". then NewKey will find it - and list all its details -for you!

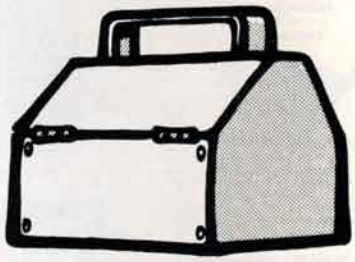
NewFile Disc Library Manager £29.95

Get organized! With all your files - on all your discs - listed and sorted so that you can see just what is where (regardless of user number). You can search and select on the all-file index itself.

You can also tag the files you want deleted to release valuable space on the discs, and the all-file index will also be updated automatically. A further utility allows you to work out which groups of files which fit onto which discs when you want to organise your library.

Much quicker and more space efficient than trying to keep track of which files have got lost on what discs!

The NewStar PCW Toolbox Collection



Order all NewStar's file manager programs for only £49.95

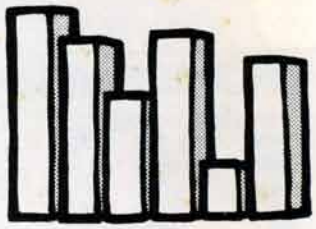
CRACKER 2
Spreadsheet with Graphics

Now with a completely revised manual incorporating the additional graphics commands, Cracker2 is still easily the most feature packed spreadsheet for the PCW and CPC series. There are 18 types of graph option, covering all the usual financial bar chart, pie chart, line graphs - and including log axis, and XY with best fit lines *(plus their equations!)*.

Cracker validates *each keystroke*, and thus avoids problems of incorrect referencing. The order of calculation is maintained accurately and may be inspected at times.

The IBM PC edition is now available in a fully memory resident form - you can switch between Cracker and applications like NewWord instantaneously. The IBM edition supports over 400k of work space (640k RAM), with up to 9,999 rows! You are not likely to run out of space. The IBM edition also supports the MicroSoft mouse for easy operation without the overheads of GEM!

Cracker incorporates a range of date calculation and timer functions, with a powerful keyboard macro system. Cracker handles DIF format, so data may be transferred from SuperCalc into Cracker without re-typing.



CRACKER 2 £49.00
IBM & compatibles £69.00

NEW STAR

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NewStar Software's colour catalogue is free on application. Phone or complete this form and send it along to get your copy of the most comprehensive collection of Amstrad CPM software, with an ever growing collection of incredible value IBM PC programs.

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8000 PLUS

So, another magazine supporting the Amstrad computers. What on earth can it offer to justify your forking out some more coins and some more of your time?

Quite a lot, we modestly think. To our knowledge this is the ONLY publication dedicated totally to the Amstrad 8000 machines – the PCW 8256 and 8512. So, you won't be distracted by material relevant only to the cheaper Amstrad CPC machines.

More importantly, you won't find the magazine taken over in the next few months by articles on the new Amstrad PC 1512. Our coverage of that machine will be contained in a self-contained supplement which, before too long, will be launched as a separate magazine in its own right.

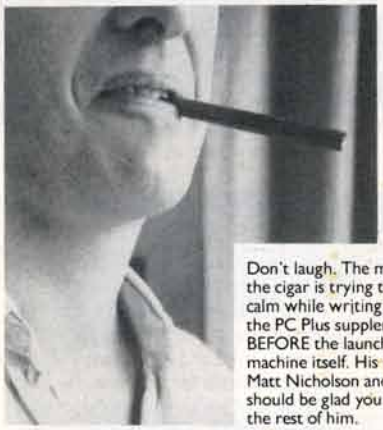
So 8000 PLUS is for the 8256 and 8512 only and that gives us considerable advantages in meeting your needs.

For one thing, without the distractions we shall have space for COMPLETE coverage of these machines. Devotion to their business and professional applications, certainly. But also to the use of the PCW at home. As an educational tool. An entertainment machine. A powerful friend capable of opening up a new world of pleasure and usefulness.

Whatever PCWs can be used for, we shall be writing about. We also want you to regard it as YOUR magazine. One which you can contribute to, criticise, laugh at, and generally feel at home with.

Here's to a long and happy relationship.

Meet the team!



Don't laugh. The man behind the cigar is trying to keep calm while writing most of the PC Plus supplement BEFORE the launch of the machine itself. His name is Matt Nicholson and you should be glad you can't see the rest of him.

Don't argue with big artman Dean Wilson. He's a mean hand with that scalpel, and not too nice without it.

Two mugs – one being staff writer Ben Taylor, the other containing the substance used to keep his brain turning over while producing our software guide. The MD FRCS bit on p40 is a joke by the way.

These fingers have been measured at 242mph – that's the rate at which editor Chris Anderson deletes Taylor's copy.

It's YOUR magazine

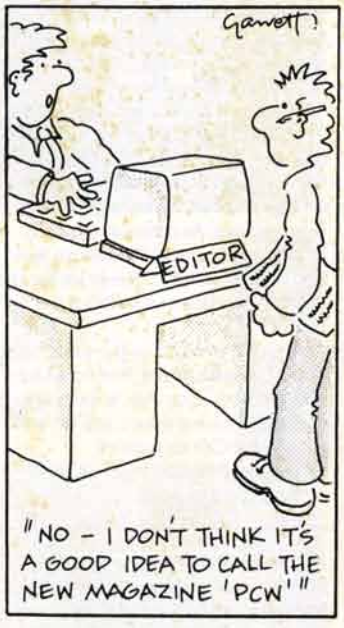
One thing will play a crucial part in future issues of 8000 PLUS. *Interaction*. You with us. Us with you. You with each other. Good magazines thrive on it.

So, this is a request for contributions. LocoScripted letters by the score is what we're after. Questions, criticisms, suggestions, donations, whatever.

One thing we're particularly interested in is to know of any unusual uses you might be putting your machine to. Or any tips you think you could pass on to other PCW owners.

If you want to go beyond that and consider writing a full-blown article or program listing, by all means get in touch. All such contributions would be paid for at good rates if published. That's what it says here anyway.

The address to wordprocess to is: **Chris Anderson, Editor, 8000 Plus, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 5AH.** You won't necessarily get a personal reply, but we're planning to publish a LARGE letters section, so any questions, etc, can be answered there.



NEXT MONTH

The next astounding (etc) issue of 8000 Plus will hit your newsagents on Thursday October 16th. Why not reserve a copy now!

Created on Amstrads

8000 Plus is put together in what many publishing houses still consider a rather unusual way. We don't use paper.

Not for producing articles, at any rate. We have a more powerful form of technology known as Amstrad PCWs. All the words in the magazine have been written and edited on these machines. And having got that far, the move into typeset form is astonishingly fast.

That's because our local typesetters, Wordsmith's of Street, just happen to be able to typeset directly from our Amstrad discs without the need for any further keying in. All the various typesetting commands – text sizes, widths, styles and the like – are included by us in our document files. So within an hour of completing the editing of an article we can be holding it in typeset form ready for layout.

So, 8000 Plus is created on the computers it's dedicated to. And that makes sense.

(Incidentally, if you're interested in seeing your work rapidly typeset direct from LocoScript or WordStar, you can contact Wordsmiths on 0458-47007.)

LOCOSCRIPT 2 ON THE WAY

Exciting developments are afoot in Dorking, the home of Locomotive Software.

The producers of the LocoScript word processor that is the main selling point of the PCW machines, are bringing out a range of follow-up software that is generating some sweaty palms at the independent software houses.

Already out is *LocoMail*, reviewed in this issue of 8000 Plus, and two more releases are on the way. First out will be *LocoSpell*, a spelling checker for LocoScript documents, developed in conjunction with dictionary publishers Longmans.

Although details are not yet fully finalised, Locomotive's Howard Fisher said that this would probably appear in two versions: one with a 30,000 word dictionary to sell at £29.95, another with a massive100,000 word dictionary for £39.95.

Unlike ordinary spelling checkers which look over a file after it has been finished, LocoSpell will take an active part in the editing process. LocoScript users will be able to spell check single paragraphs in the middle of editing the document, although this does make heavy demands on disc space.

Also coming soon is a turbocharged version of LocoScript, already nicknamed *LocoScript 2*. Few details are yet available, but it will certainly be considerably faster than current versions of LocoScript at moving around large documents. Also included in LocoScript 2 will be support for a range of printers other than the standard PCW dot matrix one.

LocoScript 2 is more than a simple upgrade of LocoScript 1.2, so hopeful users expecting it as a free update will be disappointed!

Loco logo

Locomotive Software are currently in the process of registering their distinctive trade mark, a low angle view of the wheels of a steam loco. However, they are running into trouble from an unlikely source – train spotters.

For one of Locomotive's best known products is Mallard BASIC (as bundled with the Amstrad PCW machines) named of course after one of the most famous of all steam locomotives. But alert enthusiasts have been ringing up complaining that the picture on their logo is not in fact of a Mallard class bogey at all.

Anybody wishing to fuel the controversy should not ring Locomotive, and should not ask for Howard Fisher, who will not be pleased to hear from them.

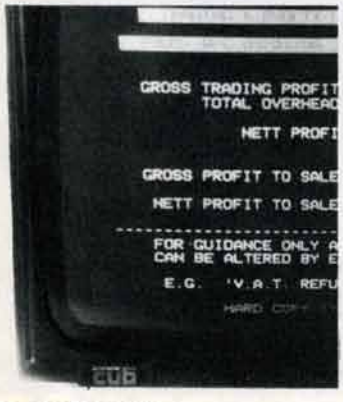
Games boom for PCW

Although the market for games software traditionally revolves around bright colours and sizzling sound effects, manufacturers are now realising that even green-screened PCW owners don't want to spend the whole day buried in their databases.

The last few weeks have seen a sudden flood of games released for the PCW, doing amazing things with the simple screen. Early titles like *Batman* from Ocean paved the way for other conversions from games machines, such as The Edge's *Fairlight* and, coming soon, *Tomahawk* from Digital Integration.

Melbourne House, Gemini, CP Software and CDS are other companies to have got in on the act, and the availability of joystick interfaces for the 8000 series machines is likely to further increase interest.

Many software houses are cautious though. Steve Wilcox of Elite, best known for a string of arcade hits on the Commodore and Spectrum computers, said of the potential for PCW products, "obviously it's an extension to the market, but we've really got to suck it and see." However, he did reveal that Elite were lining up some games for "autumn release" - probably including *Bombjack* and *Commando*.



Accounts Explained

Accounts software is not the easiest stuff in the world to get to grips with, and it's very hard for new purchasers to understand the actual requirements of an accounts packages.

Sandhurst Business Systems, who market *Micro-Simplex* aimed specifically at retailers, are now offering an introductory video tape about their package which they will loan free of charge to potential users. Contact them on 0625 615365 or 615000 for details.

ELECTRIC MOUSE

The Electric Studio, producers of the highly successful *Light Pen* art package, are releasing a new version to domestic rodent fans – it's controlled by a mouse.

The new package will, like the Light Pen version, be a screen art program allowing composition of text, regular shapes like rectangles and circles, and also freehand drawing. Instead of using a light pen to point at the screen, control will be by a mouse and pointer system.

The drawing package itself will be an enhanced version of the Light Pen one, says Electric Studio's Dave Buckingham, with the ability to enlarge and reduce amongst several new features. As a bonus, the interface that drives the mouse will also drive a joystick. The price for the mouse, interface and software set will be £129.95.

Another product in the pipeline, due for release at the Amstrad User show in early October, is an image digitiser. This hardware add-on will allow the PCW to capture information directly from either a video camera or a TV. It will be able to capture up to 10 frames per second, so owners of the Electric Studio art packages can take frames from their favourite TV programmes and edit them. No price is yet available for this, but the thought of popping pixels all over Terry Wogan and gang has got to have appeal. The Electric Studio can be contacted on 0582 595222.

► **This could be happy news for PCW owners still short of disc space. It's a 20 Megabyte Winchester hard disc which can be fitted to either an 8256 or an 8512. The upgrade, just announced by Timatic, provides a drive "C" for the PCW, and is claimed to be fully compatible with both CP/M and "LOGOSCRIPT". (The latter must be a new package for the creating letter headings which we look forward to hearing more details of.)**

Cost is a very competitive £649.99 + VAT, including a moulded box to hold your system neatly. Further details from Timatic on 0329 236727 and 239953.

LocoScript from CP/M

LocoScript is in one sense a strange piece of software in that it does not run from CP/M as most other PCW programs do. The result of this is that if you buy add-ons like spelling checkers or mailmergers, you have to spend a lot of time resetting the machine between CP/M and LocoScript.

Nabitchi computing offer a solution to this in the shape of a utility that allows Locoscript to run as though it were a simple CP/M file. £49.95 + VAT buys a package of this and an interface to allow LocoScript to use printers other than the standard PCW one.

Also available for £29.95, plus Very Aggravating Tax, is an intriguing kind of Centronics interface. It is totally software driven, and the only hardware that comes with it is a printer ribbon cable which plugs into the PCW printer port.

Details on 051-708 0123.

The parallel/serial interface (left) is just £8 more than the parallel-only version.

Alternative interfaces

Micro Control Systems have launched two new products offering cheaper alternatives to Amstrad's official Serial/Parallel interface adaptor.

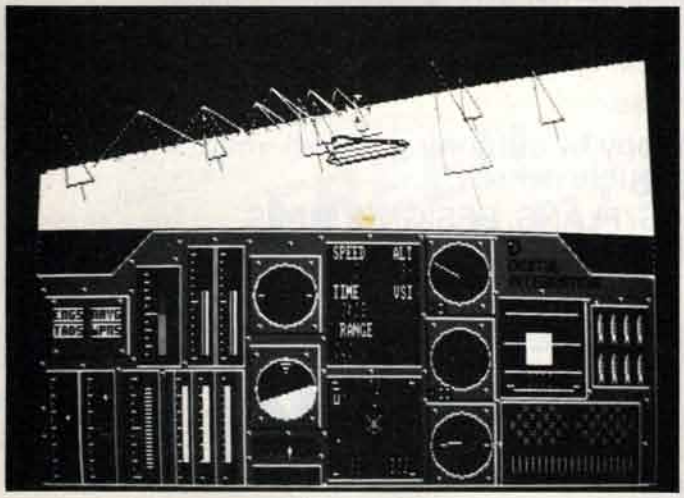
A parallel-only interface adaptor retails at £41 + VAT, and a full serial and parallel interface sells for £49 + VAT. Phone 0602 391204 for details.

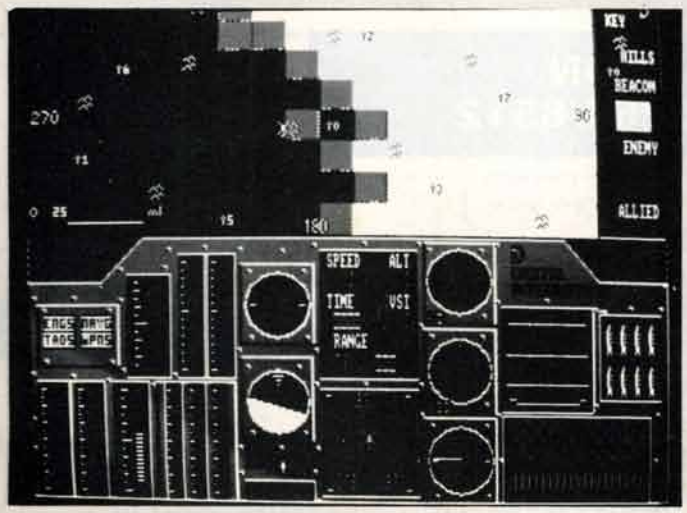
Tomahawk for the PCW

The very first flight (well, helicopter) simulator for the Amstrad 8000 series is about to lift off. It's a PCW version of the successful *Tomahawk* from Digital Integration.

***Tomahawk* has been praised in its previous incarnations on other computers, and judging from a sneak preview of the new version, 8256 / 8512 owners are in for a treat. The program offers a cockpit view over a wide and varied terrain, and as the pilot you navigate the helicopter around ground obstacles while at the same time battling with field guns and enemy helicopters.**

Digital Integration have put a lot of work into enhancing the game to make full use of the PCW's high resolution screen, and as you can see from these pictures, the results are impressive.





JoyceStick

Cascade Games of Harrogate are producing a joystick interface for the PCW machines that can control standard Commodore/Amstrad joysticks. Since the PCW is known "affectionately" by some as "Joyce" Cascade have called their product the Cascade Joycestick. Retail price is £24.95 – more info from them on 0423 525325.

Irish VAT

Two low cost new packages for small businesses have been announced by Easi-Business systems of Ireland.

"Tait Vat" and "Tait Invoicing" cost £18.95 each, and boast amongst other features "No jargon, no clumsy manuals, on screen tutorial help".

Contact Easi-Business Systems at Tait Business Centre, Dominick St., Limerick, Ireland.

The FAX of the matter

Dorchester-based Initiator are in the final stages of development of a low cost Fax adaptor for the PCW.

Fax is an abbreviation for "facsimile transmission", and allows you to send images over the phone line. Increasingly businesses are using Fax machines to replace Telex services.

Initiator's Mark Charles said that the PCW Fax would be remarkably simple. The product consists of an adaptor for the standard PCW printer: the image to send is fed into the printer as a single sheet, the adapted print head scans and digitises the page, and finally the image is despatched down the phone line.

Initiator's Fax will also be able to transmit directly from LocoScript files without going through a hard copy stage. It can receive Fax transmissions from any make of machine, and prints out on the standard PCW printer.

At the moment, says Charles, the target price is around £450 – he plans to have it available from early October. Further info on 0305 60010.

Vertical Take-Off

"Vertical Market" seems to be the current jargon phrase for specialist software packages aimed at a particular type of business. Several of these have appeared in recent weeks, so here's a brief summary of what is around:

Gemini Computers (0395 265165) are producing a Garage Management package, "aimed specifically at forecourts of all sizes". The software has been designed in conjunction with a garage owner, and the price is £1000 which includes a PCW 8256 to run it on.

Meanwhile JRA (contact Richard Hill on 01-441 7581) are releasing two products. *Mint Fixed Assets* at £79.99 is a management package for company's fixed asset registers (*got that?*) and "Mint Optician Patient Recall System" at £99.99 is a complete opticians' patient record system, from appointment recording to label addressing.

Finally, Nova-Soft (Steve Potter on 0773 768954) have produced *Videofile*, a complete video library control and management system priced at £79.95, or £675.82 including a PCW 8512 and 4 blank discs.

Back to School

School Software of Ireland are increasing their range of educational software available on the Amstrad PCW machines. Their new titles are "Biology" and "Chemistry", both priced at £12.95 and suitable for ages 12 to 16. Further info on Ireland 061 27994 (from the UK, dial 010 353 61 27994).

Create Superb Graphics

THE CHOIC

THE ELECTRIC STUDIO

LIGHT PEN c

★ The Light Pen plugs directly into the expansion port at the rear of the monitor; it is supplied complete and REQUIRES NO FURTHER INTERFACE.

★ The Light Pen simulates a "real world" pen by allowing the user to accurately freehand draw directly onto the screen.

★ Supplied with the pen is our "ART" program, which has a user-friendly ICON/WINDOW system for selection of functions, with on-screen prompts to guide the user through the program. SIMPLY PLUG IN AND DRAW!

★ Amongst the many features of the program are:
PENCIL, MULTI-SIZE PAINT BRUSH, SPRAY CAN, ELASTIC SHAPES (Rectangle/Triangle/Cube/Circle/Ellipse/Polygon), ELASTIC LINE, PINNED LINE, RAYS, ERASER, CLEAR SCREEN, INVERSE IMAGE, COPY IMAGE, MOVE IMAGE, SET POINTS, and many others.

★ PAINT FILL or BRUSH from the Texture Palette, giving an almost infinite variety of shading.

★ MULTI SIZE TEXT with horizontal/vertical/forward/backward print facility.

★ STORE PICTURES TO DISC for future use.

★ Program allows you to produce hard copy by outputting screen images to PCW8256 printer in 3 sizes (single or double density).

★ Suitable for ARTWORK, LETTERHEADS, PLANS, DESIGNS, MAPS, DOCUMENT COVERS, LOGOS, PCB LAYOUTS, and many more applications.

★ GSX DRIVER included on disc for installing the Light Pen to use with DR DRAW.

£79.95

The 9th Personal Computer World Show

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OLYMPIA, LONDON

The main event!

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STAND 1102

COMING SOON
For the PCW 8256/8512

HARDWARE:

HIGH SPEED VIDEO DIGITISER
The ultimate graphic input device.
Fully compatible with all Electric Studio graphics programs.

SOFTWARE:

FONT MODULE
Allows use of a variety of text fonts with the graphics program.

CONTACT US FOR FURTHER DETAILS

AMSTRAD COMPUTER SHOW

3-5 OCTOBER 1986
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★

See us on
STAND 39/40

On Your PCW 8256/8512

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EXPA

How to turn your 8256

The PCW8256 is excellent as a typewriter replacement, but most users find after a time that they want to use their machine as more than just electronic Tippex: which means that you'll need a bit more in your machine to do it with. TOM GRAVES describes some of the options for expanding your 8256 to the 8512 specification ... and beyond.

Why bother?

Amstrad's PCW-series machines are designed as packages – plug-in-and-go boxes. As far as Amstrad are concerned, you pays your money, and you chooses either a single-drive 8256 or a twin-drive 8512 with more memory: and that's your lot. You can plug their parallel/serial box into the back to drive a different printer or a modem, but that's the limit of the official expansion. And who, you might ask, would need more than that?

Well, actually, a lot of us. Most users find disk space a bit tight, especially on the 8256; those 180,000 characters-worth of space on each side vanish pretty quickly if you back up your files. And copying discs on an 8256 is a real chore, involving you in endless disk-swapping.

So even if you never want to create individual files too big for your 8256 to handle, there are clear advantages in upgrading. A low-cost memory upgrade to boost the size of your machine's 'RAM-disk' (the so-called M: drive) will immediately reduce disk-copying to a simple two-stage process – you simply copy an entire disk into the M drive, put in the new disk and copy the information back.

If you go a stage further and add a second disk-drive, you won't need to swap disks at all.

For many users an upgrade will make a huge difference. The first key question you should ask yourself is whether to stick to the Amstrad three-inch disc standard or, as I would recommend, to go a different route.

8512 owners

If you already own a PCW 8512 but fancy linking up to a five-inch drive, you can fit any of the options reviewed in these pages. The only catch is that it'll make your existing second drive redundant. Maybe you could take it out and flog it to an unsuspecting 8256 owner!

If you're very clever you could even persuade him to give you his discarded facia panel which you'd need to cover up the hole! But for pride's sake you'd have to blank out the bit that says '8256'.

THE OFFICIAL OPTION

Amstrad do offer, via *Dictaphone*, a standard upgrade service to convert your 8256 part-way or all the way to an 8512 specification. You can have the same double-density drive as on the 8512, the same 512K of RAM, or both – though at a fairly hefty premium compared both to the list price difference between the two machines and to the cost of 'unofficial' upgrades. If you don't want to touch your machine, and just want to upgrade it to the 8512 specification, your best bet is to take this route. Dictaphone's engineers will do all the work for you at your own home or office, and they guarantee the result. You don't have to have it all done at once, either: you can have the second drive fitted separately from the memory upgrade. Having the drive fitted will set you back £159.00 + VAT, and the extra 256K of memory to bring the total up to 512K costs £64.50 + VAT: a total of £223.50 + VAT (£257.02 inc. VAT) if you have the full upgrade to 8512 spec. For full details dial 100 and ask for 'Freephone Dictaphone".

The case for five-inches

To my mind, the 8512 suffers from one crazy design fault: although both its drives look the same, they're quite different inside. You can't use any disks written on the lower high-capacity drive in the upper one, and very often you can't do it the other way round either. (The lower drive may be able to READ disks formatted in the upper drive, but unable to WRITE to them reliably.)

You'll end up having to keep stocks of two different types of disk, marking them clearly to remind yourself which type is which. So if you have to have two different types of drives anyway, there's a good argument for suggesting that one of those drives should be the same type that almost everyone else in the computing world uses – the five-inch. (Actually five-and-a-quarter inches, but let's stick to round numbers.) Taking this option can actually save you money because of one major factor: the cost of the disks themselves. Three-inch disks – in case you hadn't noticed – are expensive and relatively scarce. The odd disk or two may seem like petty cash, but if you use a lot of disks the cost can build up in a frightening way: it's easy to spend more on disks than you paid for the computer in the first place!

Five-inch disks are available anywhere and are far cheaper: as low as 50p if you know where to look or can buy in reasonable bulk. Most of the expansion units that attach a five-inch drive to the Amstrad cost around £200, or about £50 more than upgrading to a three-inch drive, but you can recover that difference in as few as fifteen disks!

And since five-inch disks are what most other computers use, that means that you can swap files (but not necessarily programs) with users of other machines – including the much-awaited Amstrad IBM clone and other IBM look-alikes, the BBC micro and many others – without the dubious joys of messing around with cables and baud rates and the rest that Amstrad suggest when you buy the CPS8256 parallel/serial board.

One of the options we review here, the Gemini InterGem, allows you to choose the type of drive you want to connect to your system, including a 3.5" for compatibility with machines like the Apricot and many of the IBM-compatible portables. Most of the others give you a plug-in-and-go five-inch drive, which is certainly an easier way of doing it if you just want to add more disk space at reasonable cost.

All of the suppliers of disk units provide programs

UPGRADE OPTIONS

1. Bigger Ram-disk
2. 3" 2nd drive
3. 5.25" 2nd drive
4. InterGem interface

Option 1 can be combined with 2, 3 or 4, but the last three are mutually exclusive. 1 and 2 together make up the full upgrade to an 8512.

NDING

into more than an 8512!

which make it a simple matter to move files between Amstrad's CP/M and other operating systems like the IBM-clones' MSDOS or the BBC's DFS.

Taking off the back

Any upgrade, other than the official one will involve you – or a friend or colleague – taking your machine apart and putting it back together again. To some this is a daunting prospect, but you could find it easier than you think.

It's a simple enough matter to remove and replace the back of the case and, if necessary, that surprisingly small computer board (just a handful of accessible screws – Amstrad are a great deal more sensible in this than many other manufacturers). You only need a long-shafted Phillips screwdriver – not less than six inches, or you'll have trouble with the lower screws – to get at the six screws on the back.

But you do need to be aware that there may be very high voltages around that fragile television tube – even when the power is off – and that it's possible to wreck the main circuit board with static discharges and the like if you don't know what you're doing. We're pleased to note that all the suppliers described suitable precautions in their instructions: do take heed of them, or else you could just possibly damage your machine – or you – beyond repair.

You should also understand that you invalidate yourmachine's guarantee by doing it yourself. Whilst it's true that Amstrad's standard guarantee period is hardly lengthy, this certainly does matter if you've taken out a service contract on the system. If you have, you're probably best advised to stick to the official option.

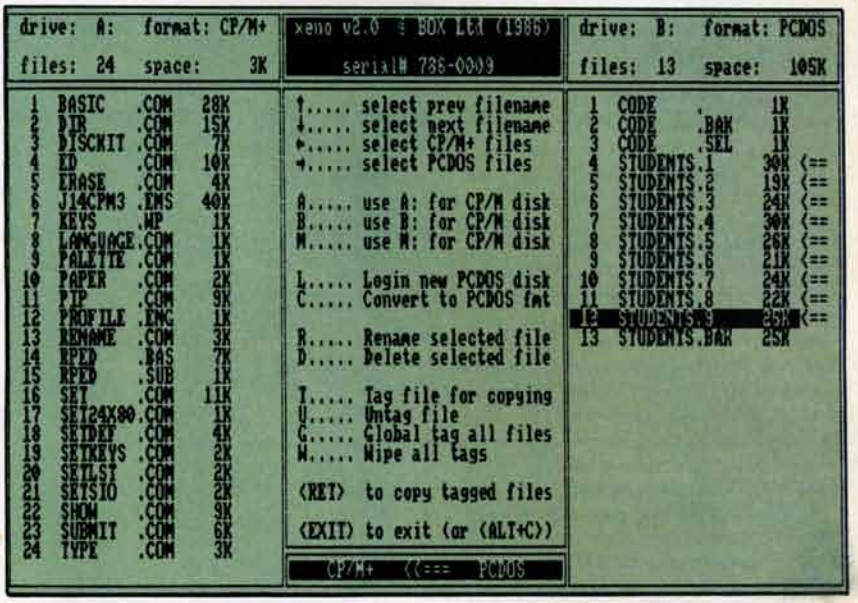
Three-inch drives

If you want to turn your machine exactly into an 8512 you'll need to invest in a Hitachi-type three-inch drive upgrade. We've looked at kits from two suppliers, Silicon City and Citadel.

In both cases, the drive is the same as the 8512's B: drive, giving you around 700K of space per disk – though it will usually work only with a higher-quality CF2DD disk rather than the standard CF2 disks supplied by Amstrad and others for the original A: drive.

Fitting the second drive is simple enough: it fits in place of the blank panel below the standard drive. Amstrad's own instructions for the process occupy all of one side of an A4 page, and most of that is pictures. Despite the rather ominous hacksaw in Citadel's advert, the only tools you should need are a screwdriver and a clear head. Everything other than the drive is already there in your machine: the cables are ready wired, and both Locoscript and CP/M software will recognise it automatically once it's fitted. It is just about possible to screw it in wrongly, or to mount the cables upside-down, but you'll have to try pretty hard to get it wrong.

Silicon City (0223 312453) charge £135.00 inc. VAT for the drive on its own, or £160.95 inc. VAT with the memory upgrade; **Citadel** (01-951 1848) only supply the complete upgrade kit, including 256K of memory, for £189.95 inc. VAT.



▲ The main menu in BOX's Xeno software. Files 4-12 on the five-inch disc in drive B have been tagged. Pressing *[RETURN]* at this point will cause them to converted from PC-DOS to CP/M format for storage on the three-inch disc in drive A.

Five-inch drives

Most other computer systems, such as the BBC or the ubiquitous IBM clones, use five-inch disks, and they're a lot cheaper than Amstrad's three-inchers: that's just two good reasons for fitting a five-inch drive rather than the Hitachi type used as standard on the Amstrad. The catch is, of course, they're bigger: they won't fit in the box. So some arrangement has to be made to extend the cables out to an external box that holds the drive, which can make things a little untidy, and certainly rather more fiddly to fit. The advantages, however, certainly seem to outweigh the little extra effort needed to fit the unit rather than a three-inch one.

We've looked at two units, supplied by **BOX** (Benjamin Oughton Xenologistics, for the curious) and **Timatic**. Both use what are known as 'half-height' drives, with the result that the metal case on both is about six inches wide by two inches high; the Timatic unit (which is also being sold by PACE) is nearly twelve inches deep, though, compared to the nine-inch depth of the BOX unit – presumably to hold the power-supply unit that the BOX drive doesn't need.

In both cases, the drive is fitted in much the same way as for a three-inch unit: you need to take the back of the machine off, and fit a connector to the cables inside rather than a complete drive. (The standard blanking plate of the front of the machine stays where it is, of course). Both drives connect to the Amstrad via a cable passed through the back of the machine, beside the printer cable. The BOX unit collects its power from the Amstrad, while the Timatic unit has its own power-supply and plug – a pity, since it detracts from Amstrad's simple 'single-plug' philosophy, but probably necessary for the rather different type of drive.

The BOX drive is a standard double-sided 40-track type as used in virtually every IBM clone. BOX's target market would be people using the Amstrad alongside IBMs and the like, for which this unit would be eminently suitable. It means that the disk capacity is limited to 360K in IBM format, or slightly more in its CP/M format.

'Foreign' files have to be copied into CP/M format before they can be used. The software BOX supply to do this is menu-driven. You select type of copy and lists of files by 'tagging' them on the screen, making it easy to pass files between CP/M and the IBM's MSDOS or PCDOS. The one limitation is that you can only read and write to the MSDOS 'root directory' – you can't access any subdirectories – which is not that much of a limitation on floppy disks anyway.

Timatic's unit is, in principle, a little more versatile, as it has a switch on the back to change between the standard 40-track to the much-higher capacity 80-track format – though you may have to use more expensive disks if you do.

The unit we were supplied could only handle two formats, a five-inch equivalent of the Amstrad 700K B: drive with the switch set to 80-track, or the standard 360K MSDOS format for file transfer to and from IBM work-alikes. The program supplied to do the job (called TDOS) was a little tedious, involving a certain amount of messing around with the switch at the back of the unit, and seemed somewhat slow in transferring files betwen MSDOS and CP/M by comparison with the BOX unit; it certainly worked well, though. The only disappointment was the restricted range of disk formats: we did feel they could have made better use of the options available on a drive of this type.

BOX also provide a 40/80-track switchable drive similar to Timatic's, but they do comment that this type of drive sometimes has difficulty reading standard 360K IBM files and similar disks: if that's your main requirement, you're safer sticking to a 40-track unit.

One slight difference between the three-inch and five-inch drive standards is in the way that the circuitry and software recognise the existence of the drive. This means that with a five-inch drive fitted you have to start up the Amstrad in a slightly odd way.

Before you turn the machine on, or press Shift-Extra-Exit to reset, you have to make sure that there is a disk in the five-inch drive, and that the drive door is closed – otherwise the Amstrad won't know it's there, and will be quite adamant that you have no B: drive. There doesn't need to be anything on the disk: it just needs to be there. For safety's sake it's best to use a scrap disk for the purpose, as some drives have been known to write garbage to any disk in the drive as the unit is powered up or down.

BOX charge £177.50 inc. VAT for their 40-track drive or £207.25 for the 40/80-track drive, with a further £23.50 for the Xeno MSDOS-to-CP/M file transfer utility; more details from them on 0865 717968. The unit from Timatic (0329 221735) costs £209.00 and includes the TDOS file transfer utility in the package.

InterGem

We've put **Gemini Marketing**'s InterGem unit in a category of its own as it approaches the question of expansion in a quite different way: it's an interface unit that allows you to connect your own choice of drive, rather than giving you a 'package deal'.

Gemini supply software and a circuit board that you fit in place of the Amstrad second drive, leaving you with a front panel with standard sockets for disk

MORE M-M-M-MEMORY

Whether or not you need a second disk drive, you can makeyour working life a good deal easier at minimal cost by increasing the size of your M-drive RAM-disk to that of the 8512.

At the very least you'll be able to do away with the chaos of single-disk copying. You'll also find it easier running big CP/M programs like WordStar and SuperCalc – they use a technique called overlaying to swap parts of the program in and out of the rather restricted workspace, pulling program segments in from disk as they're needed. This happens much faster if the program is being run from the M-drive – which you can only do if you have enough space in the RAM-disk for it.

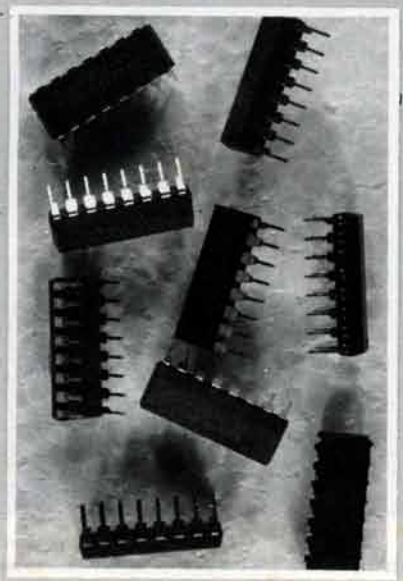
All 8256's have the sockets on board to add another 256K of RAM, so adding more memory simply means plugging eight devices into their sockets and flipping a switch or (on older machines) changing a link. You can get Dictaphone to do it for you, of course, but if you're willing to do it yourself you can save yourself half the cost or more.

The only expansion option is an extra 256K to bring the total up to 512K. So all the memory upgrades are much of a muchness: there's not much to choose between them apart from price and the helpfulness of the supplier.

***Silicon City* of Cambridge (0223 312453) charge just £25.95 inc. VAT for theirs: their instructions are clear and concise. They also supply their instructions separately for people who already have the right devices.**

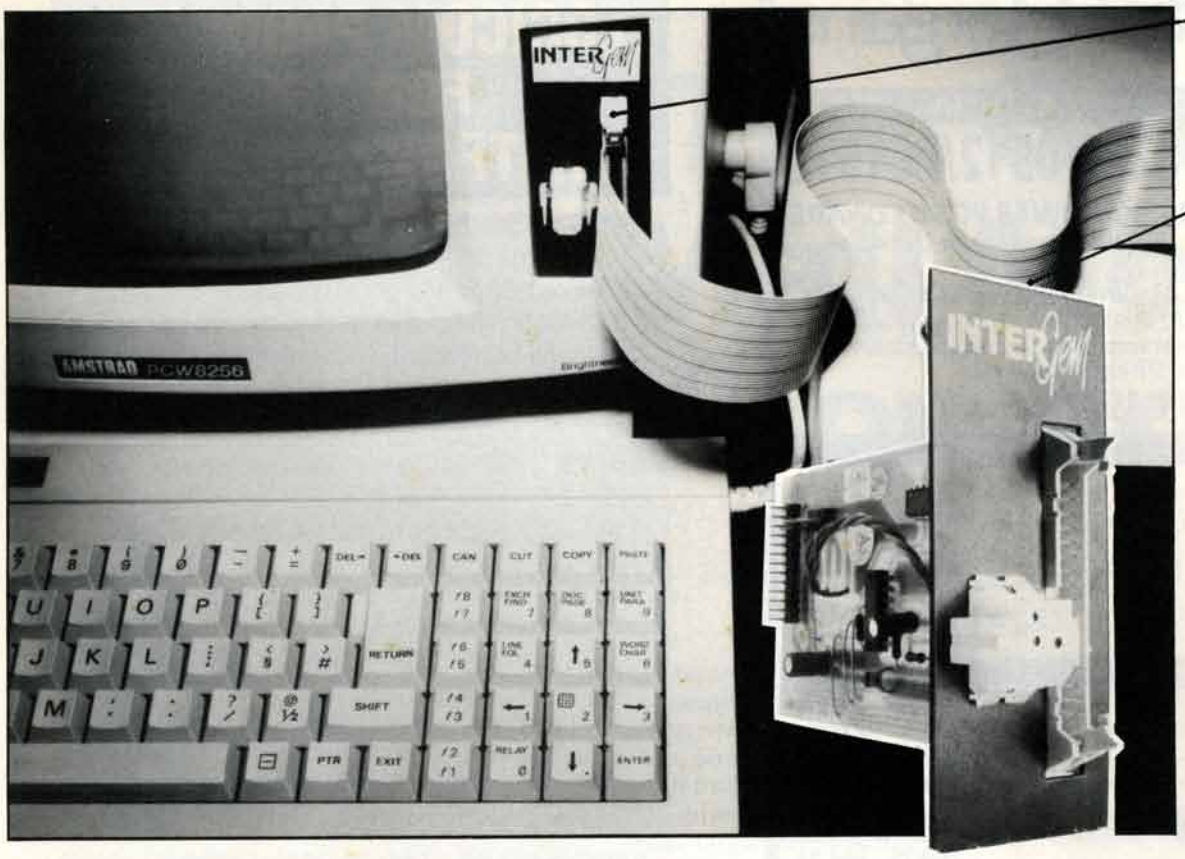
***Timatic* charge £49; their phone number is Fareham (0329) 239953.**

***Citadel Products* (01-951 1848) normally supply their memory upgrade with a three-inch drive as part of a full upgrade package, but the memory part is available separately at £39.95.**



The version supplied by *DK'Tronics* (0493 602926) is ingeniously packaged with all the devices pushed through a life-size diagram of the PCW board, to help you get everything in the right order. It's intended for sale by computer retailers (the dealer may well fit it for you), and costs £39.95 inc. VAT.

One point which all the suppliers emphasise is that the devices do not like being fitted the wrong way round... And they need to be handled with some care since their insides are highly sensitive to static electricity: they can expire even with the static created by a nylon shirt or an overly inquisitive cat. Modern devices are much more robust than the old chips used to be, but it's nice to see that Silicon City have had the realism to offer single devices at £5.00 a time in case any should fail.



• The InterGem interface unit installed in an 8256

• The unit itself.

Getout clause
We've included in this feature every upgrade kit we could get our hands on. But more and more companies are getting in on the act and prices change regularly. It's worth checking out the latest ads and phoning around before you buy!

drive power and data. It does look a little messy, with cables trailing out of the front of your Amstrad; and while this does give you a lot more versatility than the 'plug-in-and-go' approach, it's really only practical if you already know a fair amount about computers in general. If you don't... well, it's one way to learn! The easiest way to use it is to plug in a drive supplied as 'BBC compatible', available from several suppliers including Gemini themselves.

The unit can support a 3", 3.5" (as on the Apricot and the like) or 5" drive under a number of different disk formats, giving different disk capacities to match a variety of machines. The 80-track formats give you a practical capacity of at least 700K – the same as for the Amstrad CF2DD second drive – and in some cases as high as 800K. It's safest to stick to one format, though, or you're likely to end up with the unfunny game of 'guess the format' when someone forgets to label a disk correctly.

The manual lists some 65 formats that their software supports as standard, although some – such as the 'Stan Smith' format! – are clearly for individuals' 'homebrew' machines. More useful ones include DEC Rainbow, Gemini, Kaypro, Octopus, Research Machines, Osborne, a variety of BBC DFS formats and the inevitable IBM.

The software itself is supplied on a standard three-inch Amstrad disk, along with (for reasons best known to Gemini Marketing) a copy of a Space Invaders program. The drive can be set up as any of the CP/M formats, which means you can use files from those machines without copying them to Amstrad format first; MSDOS and BBC formats have to be copied first as for the other units we've looked at here.

All file copying and setting up of disk formats is done in the good old unfriendly CP/M fashion, with unintelligible program names and command lines rather than simple menus: I would say it's best suited to specialist users who need the versatility, rather than for simple expansion of your system. As someone who needs that versatility in my own work I liked it a lot, although it's certainly not the cheapest upgrade.

InterGem is supplied by Gemini Marketing (0395 265165) for £99.95 inc. VAT, including all necessary software; a suitable drive will cost anywhere between £60 and £140 depending on type – Gemini can supply a full package complete with 40-track five-inch drive for £199.95.

UPGRADE VERDICTS

BEST VALUE D-I-Y MEMORY UPGRADE
Silicon City £25.95

MOST IDIOT-PROOF D-I-Y MEMORY UPGRADE
DK'Tronics, £39.95

BEST VALUE 3" 2nd DRIVE
Silicon City £135

BEST VALUE 5" 2nd DRIVE
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For further information telephone John Fontana, on 748-2302. Telex: 957485 ROBINC G. Trade & Export enquiries are welcome.

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PC 8000

LOCOMAIL
£49.95, Locomotive Software/Amsoft

LocoMail has one major difference to all its rivals which will give it a big advantage for most people – it runs as a single keystroke command from the main menu of LocoScript. The delivery disc is in effect a new version of LocoScript which extends its commands (and maybe even fixes a few bugs?).

This means firstly that it is simple to use – you don't have to boot CP/M up – and secondly that all the LocoScript features like layouts, justified text and text styles can be freely used in letters to go through mailmerging.

All the input that LocoMail needs, i.e. the form letter and the list of data for insertion, are simple LocoScript documents. The mailmerge process itself takes place through LocoScript so you see your letter being composed on the screen in front of you as it is processed, which allows you to stop the run if you see it going wrong. And, of course, the letter is automatically reformatted to adjust to the length of the data items you insert.

LocoMail's mailmerge can run in two modes – "form fill" and full merge mode. Form filling is particularly well suited for very small mailmerge runs where it's just not worth the hassle of setting up a separate data file to do a few letters. In this mode, rather than reading its data from the merge file, LocoMail opens the merge letter like a normal LocoScript document, takes the cursor to each field to be filled in turn and waits for you to type the data at the keyboard. Once all the fields are filled, you have the option of printing or pausing to make further customised edits in LocoScript first.

For full mailmerge runs, the data is stored in a normal LocoScript document which can be easily edited. For the print run, you can either run off all the letters at once or, as with the form fill mode, pause inside LocoScript after each letter to allow you to make further special edits before printing.

Beyond these basic operations, there are a host of more complex features you can use. Apart from composing letters, you can do things like customise terms in a contract to customers needs, leaving out irrelevant ones, and automatically number the clauses consistently no matter which ones are present.

This is done with "conditional print" statements, allowing you to include or exclude text of any length depending on conditions you specify. For example you could have a sentence saying "Why don't you drop into our showroom in Windmill Street next time you are there?" which would only be printed if the postal area is in London. Also, you can use simple arithmetic (with +, -, * and /) to number things – it's almost a whole programming language, even with a form of REPEAT ... UNTIL loop!

But if that all sounds too complex, don't worry. LocoMail comes with a large and well laid out manual. The advanced features are well split away from the early stages, so if you don't need them they won't bother you. The delivery disc comes with a set of example files that illustrate the program's facilities very fully. The early parts are very well explained, but less so the more advanced ones.

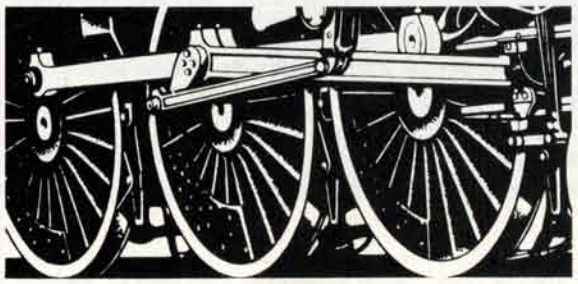
There are a few negative points to LocoMail that will irritate. Locomotive have once more succeeded in choosing bizarrely complex keys to use for the commands. !, £, :, < and > abound, rather than meaningful codes inserted with the [+] menu – it looks as though the [+] key system could not be extended enough to cope.

The Great Mail Merge Showdown

We weigh up the claims of four packages aimed at filling an important hole in LocoScript

For business PCW users in particular, one of the most common word processing applications is sending out mailshots to large batches of customers, while adding enough individual detail to make each letter seem personal.

All major word processors these days have a utility called a "mailmerger", which is specifically designed to help in the printing of these large runs of similar letters. All, that is, except LocoScript. But the last month has seen a spate of packages appearing on the market to remedy this situation – so now you can expect even larger piles of junk mail on your doormat in the mornings from eager Amstrad owners!



Second, to select a subset of a mailshot list you have to insert nasty conditional print commands inside the form letter, which requires unnecessary effort for simple uses. It would be better to have some kind of preselection command mode. Also, there is no way to sort the data file to get the letters to come out in order.

But overall, LocoMail is a comprehensive and excellent mailmerger for LocoScript users – without doubt the best of the batch. The only reasons for not buying it are (a) you can't afford the inflationary £49.95, (b) you want to use non-LocoScript word processors, or (c) you want to use your mailmerger as a database.

In which case, read on.

RANGE OF FEATURES	■■■■□	OVERALL SPEED	■■■■□
EASE OF USE	■■■■■	DOCUMENTATION	■■■■■
8000 PLUS VALUE VERDICT	■■■■■		

DATAFLOW III and MAILFLOW III
£49.95, Micro Power

It goes without saying that the independents are at a severe disadvantage when producing LocoScript-compatible mailmergers, because they can't directly access LocoScript itself. Having said this, Dataflow/Mailflow is a good, professional package that is worth considering if you feel that you are dealing with a quite large mailing list from which you wish to select and sort subsets to print off.

Although Dataflow itself is a database, the package pair is being firmly marketed as an integrated mailmerge suite, suitable for "documents created using LocoScript". Well, sort of ...

In fact it only works with LocoScript documents stored under the "Mail ASCII file" option. You independently set up your mailing or data list using Dataflow, which means both defining a data record layout and entering the data, and finally you use Mailflow to do the actual print run. Thus the process involves running three individual programs, which is more troublesome than it ought to be.

Indeed, for some inexplicable reason Micro Power have decided to have yet another intermediate stage. After entering the data, you then have to "extract it" into a special file so that Mailflow can read it. For a supposedly

FEATURES TO LOOK FOR

Whether you are looking for a simple mailshot addressing program or a sophisticated report generator, there a several basic features you ought to check out.

Firstly, consider how you actually get your names, addresses and other data onto your PCW. Most packages use a database to hold the data, which then links to a mailmerge output stage – if you have never used a database before, then you might find this more work than you thought.

Secondly, even if you are doing very small print runs you will find it useful to be able to abort the merging and restart. This is important if, for example, the paper gets jammed and you have to reprint a letter.

As for the letters themselves, if you use a lot of fancy print controls (bold, underlining and pitch changes), make sure your mailmerger can process these.

Once you progress beyond mailshot addressing, the first thing you will need is automatic text rejustification. Consider the traditional Reader's Digest letter:

Mr. C. Guevara
17 Flushing Meadow
Bognor Regis

Dear Mr. Guevara,

Congratulations! You have been chosen from all the people in **Flushing Meadow, Bognor Regis** to receive our special offer. Yes, the **Guevara** family could soon be the proud owner of "The Condensed Communist Manifesto", with a handy pull-out guide to international arms dealers ...

Many mailmergers reserve a fixed space to insert fields into, but everybody has a different length address, resulting in trailing blanks after all but the longest address lines. This doesn't matter in the actual addressee section, but in the main text of the letter it looks silly. Therefore the mailmerger should lop off any trailing blanks, insert the item in the text, and then (this is the difficult bit) rejig the rest of the paragraph to close up the gap without leaving any short lines.

Another useful feature is to be able to do arithmetic in letters. This may sound unlikely, but you often want to insert something like:
"after [number] years, your no-claims-discount will be [discount]%, so you only pay £[premium x (100-discount)/100]". Also, if you have a large list of addresses to circulate, you won't always want to print all of them, so it is useful to have a way of selecting which ones to use in a run. This is known as *Conditional printing*.

Finally, if you are doing large print runs you might want to have the facility to print the output letters presorted by postcode so as to take advantage of special Post Office discounts. In fact, these last three features are often done as preliminary operations in the database, before the mailmerge proper.

Yes, but what does

The most typical use for a mailmerger is addressing batches of letters for mailshots while adding in a few personal details in the text. As an example, here's how LocoMail approaches the process, showing each stage from thinking to posting:

The Very Big Company
Somerton
Somerset.

J. Shaw
15 Hill Street
Netherton
Wilts.

11th September 1986

Dear Mr. Shaw

We find your account with us is still overdue. Please send a cheque for £354.95 by return, or we'll send the boys round.

Yours sincerely

1 Write down a sample of what you want the letter to say, marking the bits that will change in versions sent to other people (these are underlined in the sample above).

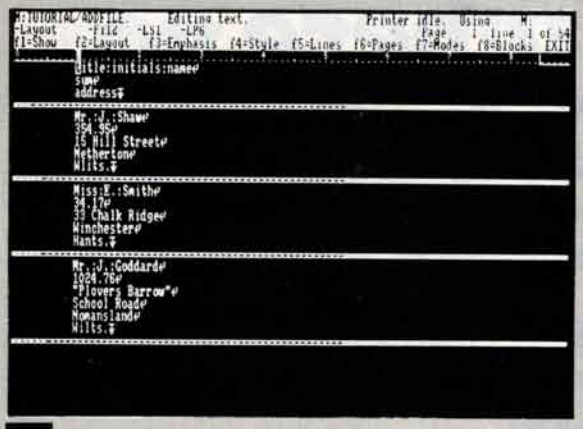
initials:	*J.*
name:	*Shaw*
address:	*15 Hill Street* *Netherton* *Wilts.*
title:	*Mr.*
sum:	*354.95*

2 Think of a short single-word name for each of the items that you marked in the sample – for example, "initials", "name", etc.

3 Type your letter into LocoScript putting the short names where you want the relevant personal detail to appear, in the way that the LocoMail manual explains. Suppose you call this document CASHLET.

a mailmerger DO?

4 Now for the actual name and address information: create a LocoScript document call, say, ADDFILE, and type in a dummy set of the information using the short names for each item. This tells LocoMail how the information is laid out.



5 Add in the rest of the data, one per page.

6 At the main Disc Management menu, type M to run the mailmerger: choose CASHLET as the document name, ADDFILE as the merge data, and select the Automatic option

7 Do the paper feeding as required, collect the letters, post them and wait for the money to come in!

integrated package, this smacks of poor design.

Dataflow is a passable database, weak on editing of data, but with a few nice features. For instance, you can input data from a file rather than keyboard, saving you typing if you already have your addresses stored as a word processor document. Another good point is that you can "reverse" names, i.e. store them as "Sparks, Ed" for sorting purposes but print as "Ed Sparks" for addressing purposes.

Mailflow, however, is a good mailmerger. Indeed, it's the best of the independents being the only one with proper text rejustification after merging; it's only a pity that you have to use Dataflow to get to it. Mailflow has its own set of printer control characters, modelled on the LocoScript type (note that you can't use the actual LocoScript ones) – for instance, to use bold text you put +B and -B around the relevant text. All told, you can embolden, underline, italicize, superscript and subscript.

There are two extra useful features. First, fields can have "default" values – for example, if there is no addressee name, use "Dear Sir" instead. Second, you can have one conditional phrase, triggered by whether a specified field is blank or not. The typical use for this is switching between "Yours faithfully" and "Yours sincerely" depending on whether the addressee name field is blank or not. This isn't as good as LocoMail's proper conditional print facility, but it's better than nothing.

Overall, Dataflow/Mailflow is a good mailmerger and database. Although it's longwinded to use, if you have to pick an independent mailmerger it produces the best results. Unfortunately, it falls between two stools: if you want a database, you can buy better for the money, and if you want a LocoScript mailmerger, you can't beat LocoMail. Non-LocoScript wordprocessors all seem to have their own mailmerger anyway.

Boffin Note

If you want to use Mailflow but don't want to plough through Dataflow's delights, then you can use a shortcut. Mailflow takes an "extract" file (.EXT) as its data input, which is created by Dataflow, and if you create a simple one of these you will quickly see what format it uses – just comma separated records of BASIC strings. You may well find it faster to create the .EXT file directly with a word processor If you find you want to modify it later, .EXT files can still be read by Dataflow for "proper" operation.

THE LOCOSCRIPT FACTOR

Most mailmergers run as programs from CP/M, whereas LocoScript does not. This means that (with the exception of LocoMail) you are bound to have to create documents in LocoScript, then reset the machine and start up the mailmerger under CP/M. If anything goes wrong, you have to restart LocoScript and do it all again, which gets pretty annoying.

More seriously, due to some apparently arcane programming practices employed by Locomotive when writing LocoScript, most independent software houses have not been able to directly access LocoScript documents effectively. This means that for mailmerging with the Micro Power and Minerva packages you have to export your documents by using the "Make ASCII file" option of LocoScript, which means you lose all your printer commands like emboldening and underlining. (Datafile One however is an exception here – it's able to use documents saved under normal LocoScript format.)

These are fairly serious disadvantages for dedicated LocoScript users who don't fancy buying LocoMail – but it's not all bad news. The fact that a mailmerger runs under CP/M means that it can also process letter templates from word processors other than LocoScript. Also, many CP/M mailmergers double up as databases, since they have to have many of those facilities anyway.

RANGE OF FEATURES ■■■■□ OVERALL SPEED ■■■□□
EASE OF USE ■■□□□ DOCUMENTATION ■■■■■

***8000 PLUS* VALUE VERDICT ■■■□□**

DATAFILE ONE

£29.95, DataRun

This is a strange little program, but appealingly priced. It comes as a completely bootable disc: just turn on, insert

To boldly drink where no man has drunk before.

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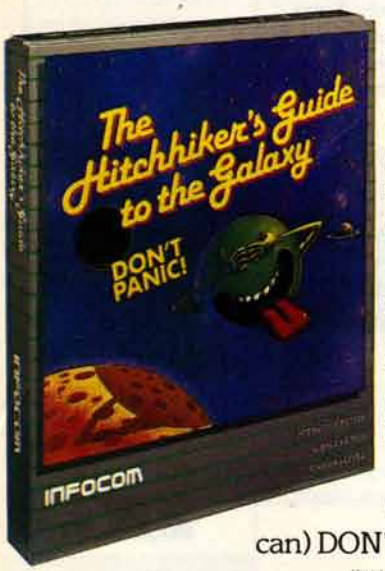

DON'T PANIC

Gulp with excitement when your planet is demolished by ruthless galactic hyper-space planners.

And split your sides as your home is bulldozed by the local council. You'll laugh so much, it'll bring the house down.

Whatever happens (and just about anything can) DON'T PANIC! For all this will prepare you for a few dangers that are a little harder to swallow.

ONE LUMP OR TWO

A journey throughout the universe can be a pretty nervewracking business. Especially when there's a whole host of perilous flying saucers, black holes and burning stars to deal with.

And when the Ravenous Buggblatter Beast of Traal asks "Would you like one lump or two?" He's not referring to sugar!

If you sense trouble is brewing you can just zap into another solar system and continue your voyage. But don't forget your towel.

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disc and go. I wonder whether Digital Research know that their CP/M boot file is being given away free.

The first oddity is that it comes as a single disk mounted on a piece of A4 card, with a brief product summary on the back. Don't you get a manual then? In fact, the documentation is stored as a database file that you read actually from inside the program by pressing a "help" key. It's a cute idea, but for beginners you really need to have a paper manual you can sit back in a chair with and browse through.

The second surprise (a pleasant one) is that the mailmerger can actually read unconverted LocoScript files, although of course it doesn't run from within LocoScript. This is a mixed blessing though, since the problems that put other manufacturers off this approach have not been solved. Although most of the simple LocoScript format commands are obeyed, DataFile won't reformat your paragraphs after an insertion. This is bad news.

Again, DataFile One is a CP/M database which mailmerges by using LocoScript documents in its report generator section. You first design your database, then enter the data, then run the mailmerger. As compared with Dataflow, the database facilities are much easier to use – it's got proper screen editing, indexing, is friendlier and just as powerful, although not as well documented.

A novel feature that ought to catch on elsewhere is text format checking during data entry – you can force the first character of every word in a field to be upper case (for addresses), or all upper or lower case as you want. Also you cancheck against maximum and minimum allowed values, and provide a default value for a field. Very nice.

The mailmerger is adequate for simple things like letter addressing, although annoyingly every field you use is preceded by a space, thus indenting addresses. In fact if addressing is all you want to do, it's very good value indeed. But not having text rejustification makes it useless for more advanced purposes, and there's no way to abort a print run and restart it.

Overall, a good value package but with a rather amateurish feel to it. The on-screen documentation is not easy to use, and the mailmerger needs skill to get the best from it. A hackers' package.

RANGE OF FEATURES ■■■□□ OVERALL SPEED ■■■□□
EASE OF USE ■■■□□ DOCUMENTATION ■■□□□
8000 PLUS VALUE VERDICT ■■■□□

FIRST BASE
£29.95, Minerva

This doesn't really belong in this article, except that Minerva seem to be touting it as having LocoScript mailmerge facilities, which is rather unwise of them in view of the reality.

First Base is really a simple database for the first time user. The Minerva philosophy is that newcomers to databases will buy it as a tryout, to see what they really need before splashing out on a bigger and better one.

This seems a rather strange sales pitch – how many people willingly spend £29.95 on a package that apparently wants to be superseded? Actually First Base is just as good as some of the costlier card index databases, only failing in its printing stage and a pretty ropey manual. But the fact that it relies on its mailmerger for anything other than very simple printed output makes it frustrating to use.

The database is a good, robust, no-nonsense card index with screen editing. One nice feature is that you can change the index field while browsing your entries, and the database is immediately resorted for you. This is handy if you want to change from browsing an address list by name to browsing by postal area.

As with Mailflow, the mailmerger works by using the database to enter data, and then running with an ASCII file created from LocoScript. There is only one program to load (apart from LocoScript). But unfortunately the mailmerger combines the worst of all possible worlds: it doesn't read unconverted LocoScript documents, it doesn't have anything beyond bog standard merging without rejustification, nor any printer controls (bold, underline etc) to make up for it.

For a product pitched heavily at beginners, the manual is strange. It is 30 pages of dense computer typeface print, with several material inaccuracies. For a start, it refers to the PCW [EXTRA] key as [EXT], which might get novices frantically scanning the keytops in vain.

Secondly, the database "List" and "Output ASCII file options" totally fail to mention a secondary menu that appears, which is very offputting. Most importantly, the mailmerge section (all of half a page) tells you wrongly to convert your LocoScript file to ASCII using the "simple text file" option of LocoScript. Wrong!!! – you should use the "page image file" option, or you get very strange margins.

Really, First Base can't be recommended for many users. It's potential market, as a database for novices, is weakened by a poor manual, and as a mailmerger it's a non-starter. However, it's cheap, and if you are confident you are good with manuals then you'll find it's good value for money as a database only.

RANGE OF FEATURES ■■□□□ OVERALL SPEED ■■■□□
EASE OF USE ■■■□□ DOCUMENTATION ■■■□□
8000 PLUS VALUE VERDICT ■■□□□

FEATURES CHECKLIST

	LocoScript files	Non-LocoScript files	Runs from LocoScript	Database Operation	Printer Controls	Automatic Rejustification	Numeric Calculations	Preselecting	Presorting	Print Run Restart	Conditional Printing
LocoMail (£49.95)	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Dataflow/Mail-flow(£49.95)		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1/2
DataFile One (£29.95)	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	1/2		
First Base (£29.95)		✓		✓				✓	✓		

Learning To Type (bother!)

TYPING TUTOR

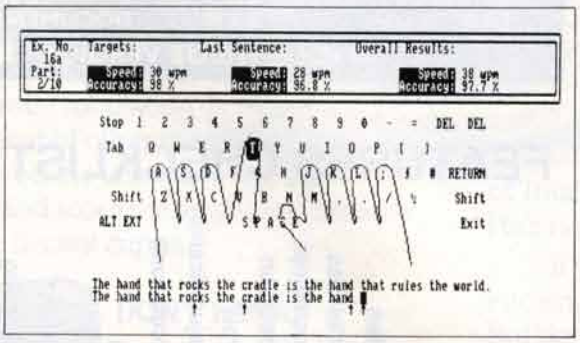
Computer One • £24.95

Typing fast is a very valuable skill that's well worth developing. Quite apart from budding secretaries, as more and more jobs involve the use of computers you will find that quoting a typing speed on your curriculum vitae can be a useful fillip. There are several typing tutor packages already on the market – two programs from Iansyst (a beginners course and an improvers course) and *Touch 'n' Go* from Caxton – so what can a new one offer?

Computer One's tutor is aimed at the typing novice rather than the amateur who can already "get by" and wants to improve. Where this tutor scores is that it has been written specially for the Amstrad PCW machines. This means that it is able to use the PCW's screen size and graphics capabilities to the full, and it certainly does.

Unusually for a typing tutor, Computer One's comes with a decent sized (14-page) user guide that actually provides useful information. Read it before you start typing, and it talks about the correct typing position, like seat height and lighting conditions. It's good to see the importance of these factors recognised, since getting them wrong will be a severe barrier to typing proficiency.

When you do start, after several screens of introductory blurb you are introduced to the "home keys" where your fingers normally rest. Subsequent lessons take you through the keyboard in pairs of keys and go through traditional exercises to reinforce each key pair before moving on to the next fingerwork.



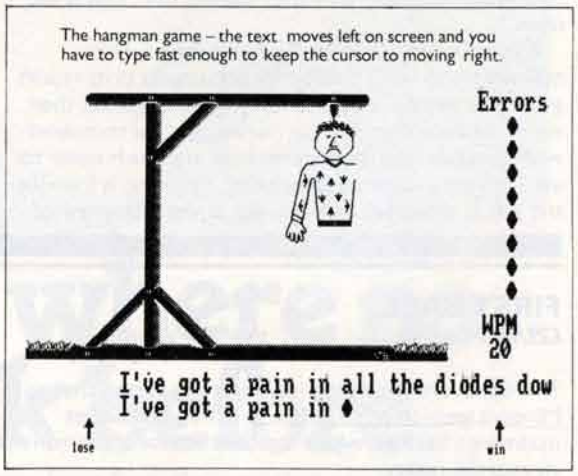
The hands show you which finger to use for each key. These figures show the current targets in speed and accuracy. Alongside are printed your actual performance in the last sentence and overall.

If you make an error the key you should have pressed is highlighted on the keyboard.

This is the sentence you have to copy. If you make a mistake the program bleeps at you.

The arrows mark the points where mistakes were made. The program never actually prints the errors on screen – you have to correct them before you can continue.

The exercise screen is informative but not cluttered. There is a full keyboard diagram to get you out of the habit of looking down at the keys as you type – it includes an overlayed diagram showing which fingers you ought to be using to get to the keys. The practice phrases appear on a single line at the bottom of the screen,and the top of the screen shows your performance and targets in words per minute and your error rate.



The hangman game – the text moves left on screen and you have to type fast enough to keep the cursor to moving right.

Although the Computer One tutor has a regimented series of lessons introducing keys in a set order, you can override the ordinary sequence and dot around as you want. This is necessary as you get better and want to concentrate on particular weaknesses. You select the lesson you want by a menu and the cursor up/down and [ENTER] keys beloved of LocoScript users.

Letter drills can get pretty boring after a while, but it's not all work and no play. An addictive hangman game comes as an extra package, which provides light relief and sharpens up your speed.

You choose a typing skill level in words per minute. A sentence appears on the right of the screen and works its way over to the left, at a speed dependent on the skill level you chose. If the challenge sentence reaches the "lose" mark, or you make too many errors, another piece of the gallows goes up. If you type fast enough to get to the "win" mark, you've saved your man. It's a nice extra to the typing tutor, but purists would say that there is no attempt in it to encourage good habits.

Overall I was very impressed with the Computer One *Typing Tutor*. It makes an effort to be interesting as well as instructive. There are, however, a few negative points:

First, the grapical presentation might not be everyone's cup of tea – some people find it distracting.

Second, there is a lot of explanatory text and "press space bar to continue" jive, which gets annoying after the first time around – there ought to be a way of speeding up the blurb for experienced users.

Finally, by its nature it is a beginners program designed to teach typing from very basics – if you are a competent two finger typist wanting to improve, you won't want your speed to drop while you relearn. In this case you might prefer Iansyst's *Two Fingers to Touch Typing Conversion Course*, even though its name sounds like an incitement to breach the peace.

PLUSES

- **Imaginative screen layout**
- **You can jump about between lessons as you want**
- **Robust user interface is proof against most mistypings**
- **Good manual**
- **Includes excellent hangman-style game for light relief**
- **Probably the best package available for beginners.**

MINUSES

- **No way of turning off slow explanatory text**
- **No improvement course for self-taught typists.**
- **Some may find the lively screen layout distracting.**

RANGE OF FEATURES ■■■■□ **OVERALL SPEED** ■■■□□
EASE OF USE ■■■■■ **DOCUMENTATION** ■■■■■

***8000 PLUS* VALUE VERDICT** ■■■■□

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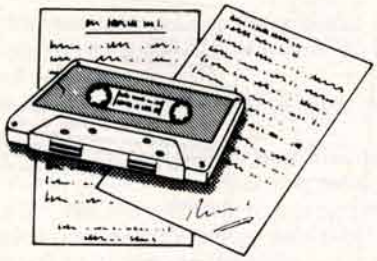

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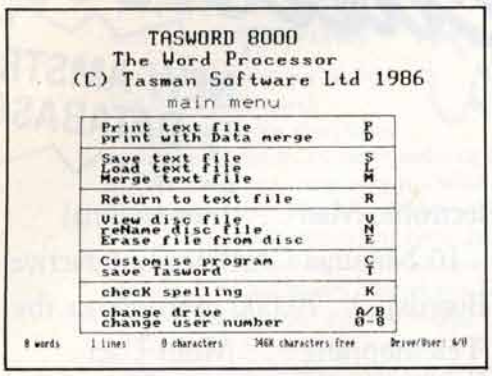
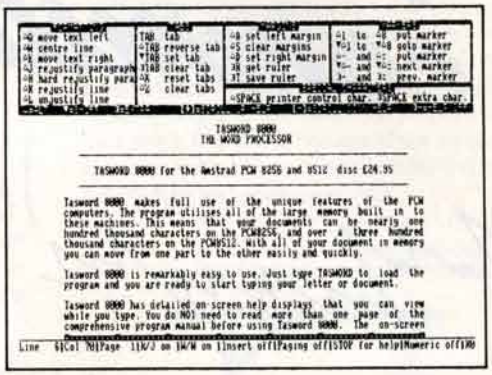
8000/10/86

TASWORD 8000

THE WORD PROCESSOR FOR THE AMSTRAD PCW 8256 AND 8512





TASWORD 8000

THE WORD PROCESSOR

TASWORD 8000 for the Amstrad PCW 8256 and 8512 disc £24.95

TASWORD 8000 offers a fast and flexible approach to word processing on the PCW 8256 and 8512.

TASWORD 8000 has been especially developed to make use of the unique features of the PCW computers, utilising ALL of the large memory built into these machines. Your document can be nearly one hundred thousand characters long on the PCW 8256 and over 300,000 characters long on the PCW 8512. That's enough room for over 100 pages!

TASWORD 8000 is fast! With all of your document held in memory at any one time, there is no need for the program to access the disc as you move through your text. Cursor commands allow the user to move through the text both easily and quickly, even with very long documents. TASWORD 8000 allows you to move rapidly to the start or end of your text and to ANY line or page number.

TASWORD 8000 is remarkably easy to use. You can view detailed help displays AT THE SAME TIME as you are typing. The detailed manual and the interactive TASWORD 8000 TUTOR supplied with the program mean you can be producing quality documents immediately – you only need to read one page of the comprehensive program manual before using TASWORD 8000!

TASWORD 8000 includes a sophisticated set of print options which allow you to print any part of your document, automatically number pages and print headers and footers. Printing multiple copies of a document is easy – just enter the number of copies required. TASWORD 8000 can be used to take full advantage of ANY printer connected to the PCW via the Amstrad parallel/serial interface.

DATA MERGE. TASWORD 8000 includes the powerful Tasword mail merge facility. You can store a list of names and addresses on disc and Tasword will print your letter, each individually addressed, to each of your intended recipients. The TASWORD mail merge is open-ended and flexible – storing names and addresses is just one application. Printing can be made conditional: just send a letter to addresses in London, for example.

TASWORD 8000 includes two of the unique TASPRINT 8000 fonts (Lectura Light and Median). This gives you two new unique typestyles on the PCW printer. The TASPRINT fonts give your printed documents a very special appearance and have great impact when used for headings within your text.

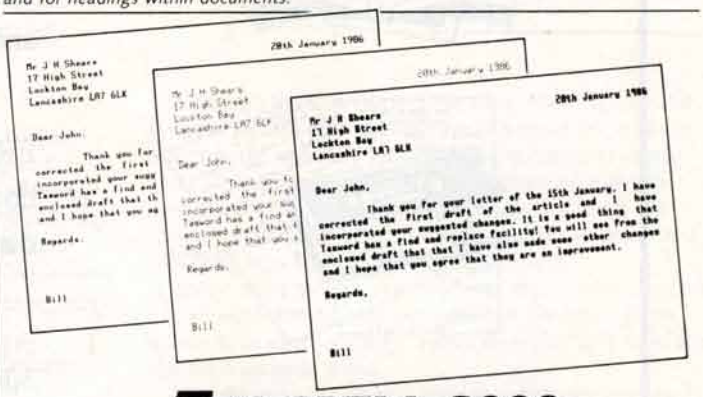
With these, and a host of other useful features such as a permanent word count, TASWORD 8000 is a fast and flexible approach to word processing on the Amstrad PCW 8256 and 8512.

TASPRINT 8000

THE STYLE WRITER

TASPRINT 8000 for the Amstrad PCW 8256 and 8512 disc £14.90

TASPRINT 8000 consists of a further six fonts that can be used with TASWORD 8000 to extend and enhance the variety and appearance of your printed documents. In addition, with TASPRINT 8000 you can print files from disc onto the PCW printer in one of the eight TASPRINT 8000 fonts. TASPRINT 8000 utilises the graphics printing capability of the PCW printer and the printed text is double the height of normal text – ideal for notices, posters, and for headings within documents.



TAS-SPELL 8000

THE SPELLING CHECKER

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8000†

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All TASMAN 464 software is fully compatible with the 664 and 6128

All prices include VAT, postage and packaging.

Super for Writers?

● The SuperWriter delivery pack, including quick start instructions, detailed manual, reference card and keytop stickers.

The first thing to strike you on opening the SuperWriter box is the professional documentation. There is not only a large manual, but also a separate pamphlet "10 minutes to SuperWriter" to get you going straight away, a quick reference card summarising all the commands, and a set of stickers to put over your keys identifying the controls. The second thing to strike you is the total lack of the word "Amstrad" anywhere in the documentation, and a handy set of 4 labels for 5.25" floppy discs.

The only reference to PCWs is in a short READ.ME file which (if you ignore a couple of errors) explains you have to run SETKEYS KEYS.WP to set the keyboard up, and also SET24X80 for the screen.

Once you've got it running, SuperWriter has all the functions you expect in a professional wordprocessor: copious on-screen help information available, block copy, move and delete, page formatting with variable margins, headers and footers. It's fast at moving around even large files, and it can control the PCW printer pretty well (once you get the hang of it!).

In addition, SuperWriter has a few things you won't find elsewhere.

► It automatically formats paragraphs on the screen as you edit them, unlike WordStar/NewWord where you have to use a manual reformat command.

► You can convert chunks of text wholesale to upper or lower case.

► There is a spell checker and mail merger both included in the price which run from the normal operating menu; no need to save the file, exit and run a different program.

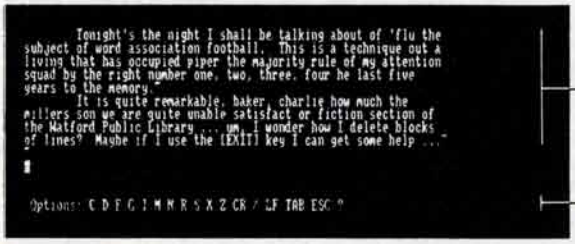
The spelling checker has a passable though definitely transatlantic dictionary, which you can customise as it runs through your file. Whenever it finds an unrecognised word, you have the option of saving it, and can also delete words you don't want (like *-ize* words). The mail merger can do conditional printing, and insert variables (like the date) at any place in the text.

But where SuperWriter really scores over the opposition is that you can define your own new commands by storing sequences of keystrokes in ".XQT" (for "execute") files, which can be run at any time. The execute files are then read as though they had been typed at the keyboard. This means you can automate all manner of operations you find yourself carrying out regularly. For example you could store the sequence of keystrokes required embolden the current line being edited. Then every time you wanted to embolden another line you could do so with just three keypresses.

So what's the bad news? Well, if you had an IBM PC then SuperWriter would be almost ideal, but the version for the PCW just has not had enough work done on converting it. It doesn't use the full PCW screen size, and the manual and keyboard are really angled to PCs. Also, to get the full benefit from SuperWriter you need to understand roughly how CP/M programs work in order to install it properly. In particular, there is no help on which printer type the program needs to be told it is using – actually an Epson LQ1500.

SUPERWRITER £49.95, Sorcim/Software City

The really big flaw though is that SuperWriter can't handle files much longer than 30K (5-6000 words). That's because it has a slightly different view of documents to most word processors – you load an entire file into the working memory and all operations take place from there. This makes text operations very fast, but the restriction on file length can be annoying, especially as the main reason why many PCW owners would consider another word-processor is precisely for editing long files. Fortunately there is a not-too-inconvenient way round the problem by stringing together more than one file when printing – the program allows you to have continuous numbering and formatting.



This is text which you have produced on the main editing screen.

Pressing *[EXIT]* produces this brief list of options

Then pressing *?* brings up this more detailed information. You can invoke any of these options without the help screen appearing by pressing *[EXIT]* followed immediately by the relevant key.

● One of the many help screens.

Overall, SuperWriter is potentially the most powerful word processor available on PCWs, but it needs some work to realise that. If you can read manuals well enough to install it properly, and you aren't bothered about not being able to edit more than 6000 words at once, then it is highly recommended.

Extra help

SuperWriter users who feel cast adrift by Sorcim's lack of support might like to know of a source of help. Ansible Information have a long track record with SuperWriter products on other computers, and can provide packages like a full keyboard configuration program and extra spell checker dictionaries. For further information, contact them at 94 London Road, Reading, Berks RG1 5AU.

PLUSES	MINUSES
⊞ Copious, well-presented documentation	⊟ No PCW-specific information in the documentation
⊞ Spell checker and mail merger included in the price	⊟ Can't edit documents larger than 30k in one go
⊞ Impressive range of possible editing features	⊟ Doesn't use the full PCW keyboard or screen size
⊞ New commands can be defined with .XQT files	⊟ Needs some intelligence to get the printer fully operational.
⊞ Fast moving around large documents	
⊞ The screen stays properly formatted during text insertion	
⊞ Good control of the printer, including conditional printing ability	

RANGE OF FEATURES	■■■■□	OVERALL SPEED	■■■■□
EASE OF USE	■■□□□	DOCUMENTATION	■■■□□

8000 PLUS VALUE VERDICT ■■■■□

HOW TO TURN YOUR PCW8256/8512 INTO A BUSINESS WORKSTATION

SANDPIPER ACCOUNTS

A SIMPLIFIED INTEGRATED ACCOUNTING SYSTEM

Each transaction need only to be entered once,
all relevant ledger postings happen automatically at the time of posting.

Specially written for PCW8256
Utilizes the RAM Disk to eliminate the need for changing disks during the day.

Personalized invoices/ statements/remittances
Produces Professional Documents with Full Business Details on Inexpensive blank paper thus improving your company's image. Designed to fit standard window envelopes.

Large file capacity
Sufficient Sales, Purchase, and Nominal Ledger Records may be kept for most businesses on 1 data disk.

Easy to use - Designed for Inexperienced Users
Full instructions for use appear on the screen. The comprehensive manual need only be used for reference.
Full customer telephone support - available if required.

Sales Ledger
Invoice Posting
Cash Receipts
Debtors List
Statements
View Account

Purchase Ledger
Bill Posting
Cash Payments
Creditors List
Remittances
View Account

Name & Address Labels

Nominal Ledger
Lists of Accounts
Reports
Periodic Transactions
N.L. History

Cashbook
Bank Statement Entry
Full Reconcilliation
Periodic Transaction View
(gives TRUE cash status)

VAT Returns invoicing/ Credit Notes

Single Drive System:
200 Accounts
(Sale, Purchase)
1000 Transactions
200 Nominal Accounts

Dual Drive System:
1000 Accounts
(Sales, Purchase)
4000 Transactions
200 Nominal Accounts

Management Reports
1) Stock Report
Value of Stock
Cost of Sales
2) Assets including Depreciation
3) Prepayments & Postpayments
4) Expenses
5) Profit & Loss
6) Balance Sheets

SANDPIPER PAYROLL

A SIMPLIFIED INTEGRATED PAYROLL SYSTEM

designed to be fully compliant with all current tax/National Insurance guidelines.

High capacity
up to 100 employees per data disk.

Department management
up to 100 departments may be held on each payroll data disk.

Tax compatible
handles all H, L, P, V, BR, D, NT, F tax codes both normal and week 1/month 1.

National Insurance compatible
contains N.I. tables A-G.

S.S.P. compatible
handles all S.S.P. rates and caters for full attendance records and automatic calculation of S.S.P. qualifying days and S.S.P. to be paid.

Additions and deductions
the system caters for 13 additions - pre and post tax - each of which may be pre-set (e.g. union) or entered for each period (e.g. expenses). The post tax tax deductions may also be factored on a sliding scale from the pay this period.

Overtime rates
caters for the 7 normal overtime rates.

Pension schemes
the system incorporates most pension schemes on fixed value or sliding scale.

Holiday pay
caters for statutory, unpaid and holidays at two rates with full records for the year.

Documents
the system caters for P35 and P60 prints as well as full employee details prints.

Annual updates for TAX and N.I. changes are available together with full software support if required.

DEALER ENQUIRIES WELCOMED

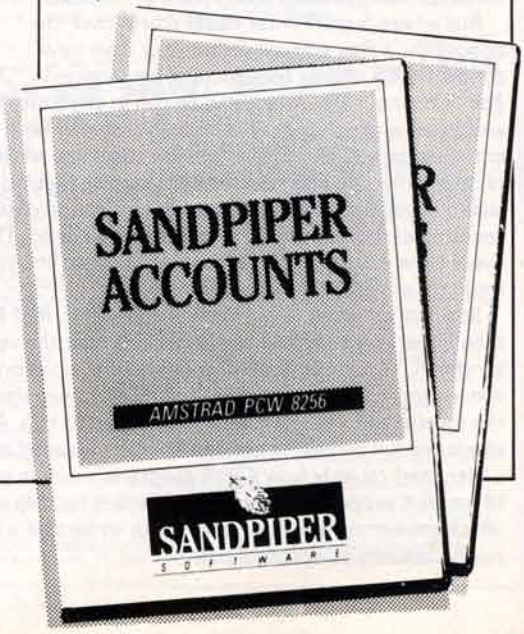
Please send Sandpiper Accounts
Single Drive System **£129.95** inc VAT ☐
Dual Drive System **£149.95** inc VAT ☐

Please send Sandpiper Payroll
Single Drive System **£ 69.95** inc VAT ☐
Dual Drive System **£ 79.95** inc VAT ☐

Sandpiper Combination Packs:
Sandpiper Single Drive System Accounts & Sandpiper Payroll **£179.95** inc VAT ☐
Sandpiper Dual Drive System Accounts & Sandpiper Payroll **£199.95** inc VAT ☐

Please send for details: Sandpiper Accounts ☐
I enclose cheque made payable to: Sandpiper Software Limited ☐ Sandpiper Payroll
Please debit my ACCESS/VISA ☐

Name _____
Address _____
_____
_____
Tel. No. _____



SANDPIPER
SOFTWARE

SANDPIPER SOFTWARE LTD.
24 Abbot Street, Wrexham,
Clwyd LL11 1TA.
Tel: 0978 358832

WHICH ACCOUNTS PACKAGE?

Here's the scenario. You're a small businessman who owns a PCW. You realise it's more than a word-processor and are considering using it to computerise your accounts.

One thing's certain: there's never been a more economic way of doing it. Just as your PCW cost you a fraction of the cost of an equivalent machine of a year or two ago, so the cost of accounting packages themselves has been slashed. On a different machine you could expect to pay five times the price of these packages for essentially the same performance.

Even so, there are tough decisions involved. Making the transfer onto a micro can be a major operation. You could spend weeks getting used to software you'd spent £150 on only to discover that the package wasn't really suitable.

Maybe we can help. DAVID ADAMS is a practising company accountant and also the owner of a PCW 8512. He's spent the last few weeks poring over the main accounts packages available on the PCW machines. All of them are integrated systems aimed at professional users.

His findings should help you decide which one is suitable for your business.

SAGESOFT POPULAR ACCOUNTS

Sales ledger ● Purchase ledger ● Nominal ledger

This package, several thousand of which have already been sold to PCW owners, has a bigger brother called *Popular Accounts Plus* which includes an invoicing and stock control module and costs an extra £50. However we reviewed the simpler version.

The software is supplied on a single floppy disc with comprehensive manual. There's also an audio cassette which gives an introduction to the accounts package and to CP/M plus a "rolling demonstration" on disc and a tutorial. The package is available for the CPC6128 as well as the PCW range and instructions are included for each variant.

Unfortunately there is some confusing advice on configuring the system for the PCW 8512 – it implies that having formatted a CF2DD disc for drive B the program can still write to this disc in drive A, an operation that is not permitted by the operating system! The instructions for personalising the master disc (which cannot later be amended) are also less than complete.

These confusions aside, the instructions are very comprehensive and should allow even the totally non-experienced to set up and run the system. The instruction manual advises the inexperienced to consult an accountant before setting up the nominal ledger although a suggested layout is provided.

There is some very good advice on how to keep good backup copies of the data discs, an item easily overlooked by the first-time user.

You can choose how the data files are to be configured. For example, a twin drive system could cope with 300 sales accounts, 150 purchase accounts and 200 nominal accounts, leaving room on the data disc for 1200 transactions.

FUTURE PUBLISHING LTD VAT Reconciliation Date Range From : 01/01/85 To : 31/01/85 Page : 1

No.	Type	Date	Cheque	A/C	N/C	Details	Debit	Credit
32	SI	5/ 1/85		94	101	Computer,Printer		267.75
33	SI	5/ 1/85		76	102	Accounts Programs		56.25
34	SI	6/ 1/85		80	101	Computer,Printer		444.00
35	SI	6/ 1/85		52	103	Diskettes		9.00
36	SI	6/ 1/85		61	103	Listing Paper		6.75
37	SI	7/ 1/85		76	102	Payroll program		29.25
38	SI	10/ 1/85		57	102	Accounts Program		56.25
39	SI	11/ 1/85		81	103	Diskettes		22.50
40	SI	14/ 1/85		87	101	Computer,printer		267.75
41	SI	14/ 1/85		76	102	Costing program		44.25
42	SI	14/ 1/85		94	102	Accounts program		56.25
43	SI	14/ 1/85		80	103	Listing paper		4.50
44	SI	17/ 1/85		68	101	Computer,printer		803.25
45	SI	18/ 1/85		51	101	Computer		367.50
46	SI	18/ 1/85		73	102	Accounts program		56.25
47	SI	19/ 1/85		53	102	Accounts program		56.25
48	SI	19/ 1/85		86	102	Payroll program		29.25
49	SI	20/ 1/85		57	103	Diskettes,paper		31.50
50	SI	21/ 1/85		80	103	Diskettes		11.25
51	SI	21/ 1/85		68	102	Accounts program		56.25

● A totally accurate guide to spending at Future Publishing from the Sagesoft package.

SALES LEDGER

When setting up the system, care must be taken in arranging the account numbers of your customers as all printouts are produced in numerical sequence only. For this reason it is necessary to calculate how many numbers need to be reserved for each letter of the alphabet if printouts are to be in alphabetical sequence – if insufficient space has been left for subsequent additions the reports would soon become very muddled. You could keep a separate cross reference list, but even this would not be very satisfactory in a business with constantly changing customer or supplier lists.

On the plus side, there is a provision to print a list of customers with or without addresses and labels may be produced for mailshots or for the sending of statements.

Details of invoices, credit notes and receipts may be entered in batches but there's a maximum of just 15 entries per batch and no provision for analysis across more than one nominal account. So if you've sold a customer two different items which you needed to keep separate sales totals for, the invoice details would have to be entered twice.

There is, however, a very useful provision for a description of up to 25 characters per line which will subsequently appear on all screen enquiries and printed reports. Any errors on inputting the batches may be corrected very easily on screen before acceptance, after which all transactions are updated to the accounts immediately. Audit reports are not produced at this time but may be produced later and are quite comprehensive.

There is no provision for making journal entries for adjustments – these would need to be entered as either invoices or credit notes.

The cash receipts program allows allocations against the transactions which are shown on the screen but does not allow for discounts which may have been taken and these would also need to be entered as credit notes.

However there is provision for marking invoices as part paid or to show cash received as "unallocated" for subsequent allocation.

FUTURE PUBLISHING LTD — AGED DEBTORS ANALYSIS — Balances as at :31/01/85 — Page : 1

A/C	ACCOUNT DESCRIPTION	CURRENT	1 MONTH	2 MONTHS	3 MONTHS	OLDER	BALANCE
51	Associated Heat Services	2,817.50	1,320.40	264.84	0.00	0.00	4,402.74
53	Adcal Services Ltd	431.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	431.25
57	Border Series Ltd	672.75	0.00	3,641.50	0.00	0.00	4,314.25
61	D.W.Carroll & Son	51.75	0.00	299.79	115.00	0.00	466.54
73	Errington Reay & Co	431.25	0.00	768.51	0.00	0.00	1,199.76
76	Galaxy Catering	994.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	994.75
80	Hoke International	3,490.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,490.25
81	H.Irwin & Sons	138.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	138.00
86	Penshaw Coaches	224.25	2,456.39	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,680.64
87	Peakin Enterprises	2,052.75	376.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,429.25
90	Riverside Rentals	0.00	0.00	1,271.56	0.00	0.00	1,271.56
94	Trident Products Ltd	2,484.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,484.00
95	Tru-Fit Kitchens	0.00	3,126.41	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,126.41
		13,788.50	7,279.70	6,246.20	115.00	0.00	27,429.40

● The people to chase: Sagesoft' aged debtor analysis.

An Aged Debtors report can be printed showing the balances over four months and highlighting any accounts which have balances greater than the credit limit set.

Monthly statements may be produced at any time for ranges of accounts – but only on preprinted stationery available from Sagesoft at £40 per thousand (or at a higher price if personalised with your name).

SAGESOFT ACCOUNTS

Supplier: Sagesoft (091-284-7077) ● £99.00

PLUS POINTS

- ⊞ **Very clean, tidy and logical screen layouts and menus**
- ⊞ **Easy to set up and use with excellent documentation**
- ⊞ **Narratives with all transactions**
- ⊞ **Good audit trails and VAT reports**
- ⊞ **Can produce formatted trial balance**

MINUS POINTS

- ⊟ **Restrictive account numbering layout**
- ⊟ **Preprinted stationery required for statements**
- ⊟ **Small batch sizes**
- ⊟ **Only single nominal and VAT analysis per item**
- ⊟ **Does not cater for settlement discounts**
- ⊟ **No purchase ledger remittance advice print**

PURCHASE LEDGER

The purchase ledger is almost identical to the Sales Ledger in operation but does not hold details of the suppliers' account reference or address and does not produce remittance advices or labels.

Aged creditor reports can be printed but there is no provision to highlight when particular invoices should be paid or to identify discounts which may be taken. Again, discounts would need to be entered as credit notes

NOMINAL LEDGER

Nominal accounts are numbered from 1 to the maximum number initially specified and trial balances will print accounts (those that have been used) in numerical sequence only. The nominal account numbers for the main control accounts are predetermined by the system – this may help in getting set up, but it limits the program's flexibility.

You can however produce monthly accounts or budget variance reports by the use of a comprehensive accounting layout. Budgets may be entered as annual amounts which the computer will automatically divide into equal monthly sums or may be input as different monthly figures. Unfortunately the procedure for actually producing these reports involves copying some files to a separate disc and not just selecting the reports from the menu.

In addition to the automatic posting from sales and purchase ledgers, posting may be by journal entry, again with a maximum batch of 15 items. There are separate procedures for posting cashbook receipts and payments and petty cash payments directly including the facility to enter VAT as appropriate. Any accounts may be interrogated on the screen or output to the printer and transactions are held until a periodic reconfiguration of the disc is carried out to release more space for transactions.

VERDICT

Although this is a very neat and easily implemented suite of programs there are a number of limitations which really mean that it is best suited to a very small business with a fairly static customer and supplier base.

CAMSOFT PSIL

Sales ledger ● Purchase ledger ● Nominal ledger Invoicing ● Stock control

All five main programs and the numerous related files which make up this package are supplied on a single disc, which comes with a comprehensive manual in a stiff binder.

The manual includes plenty of information specifcally for the PCW machines. Detailed advice is given on how to get the program up and running with the right number of accounts and transactions allowed for the memory you have available. And the software includes a routine which automatically pips the various programs into the memory drive (M:). This frees up the floppy drive(s) for data discs and makes the programs run more quickly. It also means that little if any disc-swapping is required with this package, even on a single-disc 8256. But although it shouldn't take you long to get the program running, setting up your accounts structure could prove more problematic –
there is no default system provided so you have to start from scratch. This involves creating at least eight nominal accounts with five-character names linked to summary accounts (and incidentally the program can do strange things if you don't stick to capital letters!). If you know what you're doing the system is very flexible, but you may well need to involve your accountant.

Here are some other general features:

► A powerful search and sort of all records is incorporated enabling records to be accessed on a number of criteria.

► You can specify up to ten different passwords to prevent unauthorised eyes peeping at the figures!

► It is possible to change the printer codes to configure the system to suit most printers.

► All printing is on to plain paper avoiding the need for expensive pre printed stationery for small businesses with a low turnover.

► Files may be "exported" to Locoscript for subsequent editing.

STOCK CONTROL

This can be used as a self contained stores control or linked to the invoicing program for automatic reduction of stock quantities. It is possible to flag any stock item not to be reduced when invoiced, thus allowing for a mixed stock control and product information file. The system also provides for manual adjustments.

Stock movements can be analysed over 4 product

groups, 125 analysis codes, 3 dimension codes and 125 supplier codes. The record holds cost price plus up to 3 different sales prices together with month-to-date and year-to-date usage and value.

INVOICING

The invoicing program is linked to both the stock and customer files which means that addresses and goods descriptions can be entered automatically. Up to three standard prices are catered for and customer files can be set to give a netted discount to hide any internal pricing structure.

The program caters for freehand input of non stock items or narratives and calculates the invoice and VAT on the screen for checking before printing. The invoices are printed on plain paper with as many office copies (plainly identified) as may be required. Details of invoices are recorded in a Day Book file which can be printed or displayed at any time.

Standard settlement discount can be set up on the control file and the program will automatically calculate both the amount of discount and the settlement date. This can be overridden by the operator and if no discount is allowed it will not show the facility on the invoice – very tactful.

Credit notes can also be created using this program but these do not automatically adjust stocks.

There are no options for the nominal ledger codes to be varied for different items on the invoices or even within the batch, they are all posted to a default account specified when posting the day book to the sales ledger.

SALES LEDGER

Invoices and credit notes raised through the invoicing program would normally be posted automatically to customers' accounts as described above. But these items, together with cash receipts and journal entries can also be entered manually in batches.

Invoices posted manually may have split nominal and VAT analysis. Disputed transactions may be marked and accounts with such transactions may be subsequently printed exclusively for checking.

Statements, and aged debtors customer lists can be selectively printed at any time. (The aged debtors list shows customer telephone number and credit limit for easy chasing of overdue accounts.)

PURCHASE LEDGER

The purchase ledger is very similar to the sales ledger with the addition of a remittance advice print at the end of the payment posting run. There is no facility for marking invoices with a payment date or with discounts due. Items in dispute may be flagged.

NOMINAL LEDGER

Any number of accounts can be set up, subject only to the data disc limitations but each must be linked to a "summary account". For example you might have a summary account called "Salaries" with individual accounts for different departments. Balance sheet

```
Integrated Accounts          Stock Reports        09945841    25 JUL 86 Page  1

          Selection Option(s) : 1

Stock Reference CF2
   Description   3" Discs
   Product Group   4                    Price Per          1
   Sales Price        4.30              Cost Price         3.00
   Analysis Code        10   Dimension Code      1   Supplier Code          1
   Physical Stock       50   On Order Qty        0   Reorder Level         50
   Lead Time Wks         2   MTD Usage           0   YTD Usage              0

Stock Reference CF2DD
   Description   3" D.Density Disk
   Product Group   4                    Price Per          1
   Sales Price        7.85              Cost Price         5.00
   Analysis Code        10   Dimension Code      1   Supplier Code         50
   Physical Stock       10   On Order Qty       20   Reorder Level         50
   Lead Time Wks         5   MTD Usage          40   YTD Usage            510

Stock Reference MAG01
   Description   Magazine
   Product Group   2                    Price Per          1
   Sales Price        1.00              Cost Price         0.50
   Analysis Code         2   Dimension Code      2   Supplier Code         50
   Physical Stock      975   On Order Qty        0   Reorder Level          0
   Lead Time Wks         1   MTD Usage          25   YTD Usage             25

Stock Reference WIDG01
   Description   Widget
   Product Group   1                    Price Per          1
   Sales Price       14.00              Cost Price        10.00
   Analysis Code         1   Dimension Code      1   Supplier Code          1
   Physical Stock       65   On Order Qty       20   Reorder Level         20
   Lead Time Wks        10   MTD Usage          50   YTD Usage            100
```

● Camsoft's Stock report

accounts are identified so that balances are not cleared down at the year end. As trial balances are printed in alphanumeric order it is important to carefully plan the accounts so that meaningful reports can be extracted.

There is provision for up to 15 cost centres with an ability for costs to be apportioned over them on a percentage basis and there is a budget facility with either fixed or variable monthly budgets.

As well as the automatic postings from sales and purchase ledgers it is possible to enter journal batches and cash book batches directly.

VERDICT

For a small company with a requirement for invoicing and stock control with good statistical reports this is a useful and versatile program. Compared to Sagesoft it's more powerful but harder to set up.

CAMSOFT PSIL

Supplier: Cambrian Software (0766-831878) ● £149.95

PLUS POINTS

- **Good installation on PCWs including use of M: drive for speed of operation.**
- **Invoices created "on screen" with full facilities for settlement discount.**
- **All printing on to plain paper**
- **Very flexible nominal account structure**
- **Easy printer configuration**
- **Excellent sort and search facilities**
- **Sorts all transactions into date order on accounts**

MINUS POINTS

- **All transaction posting requires the operator to use the full five-digit account code**
- **No facility to run the ledgers in different accounting periods**
- **No final accounts reports available on nominal ledger**
- **Untidy menu structure**
- **Limited nominal analysis from invoicing**
- **Occasional use of the "Exit" key when prompted annoyingly dumps you back in CP/M**

M.A.P. BUDGET ACCOUNTS

Sales ledger ● Purchase ledger ● Nominal ledger Invoicing ● Stock control

This is a very comprehensive and professional accounting package brought down to the PCW machines at a considerably lower price than would be charged for use on larger computers. Because it is such a large package the programs are spread over two discs, with another disc supplied containing a "rolling demonstration". To run the software effectively as an integrated package you need an 8512 (or expanded 8256) with the B drive used for your data disc.

This should give plenty of space for coping with the requirements of a small business. For example, you could set up 300 sales and 100 purchase ledger accounts together with the standard nominal size of 250 accounts and a stock control system of 200 records and still leave room to spare.

ACCOUNTANT-SPEAK

If some of the terms used in this feature aren't going down too well, you're probably suffering from a symptom called Financiojargonitis. Full treatment requires three years in a nasty institution, but for a quick remedy you could taste the following teaspoonfuls of info.

SALES LEDGER
The regularly updated record of a company's customers. Each customer is normally allocated a separate account which provides a record of sales to them and shows how much is owed at any one time.

PURCHASE LEDGER
Same as sales except for suppliers rather than customers.

NOMINAL LEDGER
The collection of accounts a company maintains to provide a detailed analysis of its spending and income. For example, separate accounts might be kept for Salaries, Property expenses, Promotional costs, and Purchases of various kinds of goods. In an integrated accounts system this information would be fed in automatically from the Sales and Purchase ledgers.

JOURNAL ENTRY
An entry made as an adjustment to an account – for example to correct an error.

POSTING
Nothing to do with the GPO. Posting simply means adding a piece of information to an account.

AGED DEBTORS
Not a reference to your customers who're over 70. Simply the people who owe you money.

AUDIT TRAIL
Not the bloodied remains left after a visit by the Inland Revenue. It refers to the means available in an accounts system for tracing the history of any particular transaction. For example, a printout of a customer's account should give references which could lead you directly to your copies of any invoices sent to them.

SETTLEMENT DISCOUNT
A discount allowed if an invoice is paid for within a short time, say seven days.

Each ledger can be run with one program disc and the inevitable disc-swapping is only required when changing from one ledger to another. Normally good screen prompts advise you when to do this but occasionally (and annoyingly!) a disc error occurs.

The menus in general are very logical and easy to use giving clear screen prompts where necessary.

A very comprehensive manual is supplied complete with suggested Data Input forms suitable for photocopying. But being a standard manual and not specific to the PCW, it includes reference to a few facilities which are not available on this budget package.

Some other general points:

► When first setting up the system it is necessary to telephone MAP for a password to allow the entering of your name – this is to safeguard the system from pirating.

► Invoices,statements and remittances may be printed on plain paper or on preprinted stationery available from MAP.

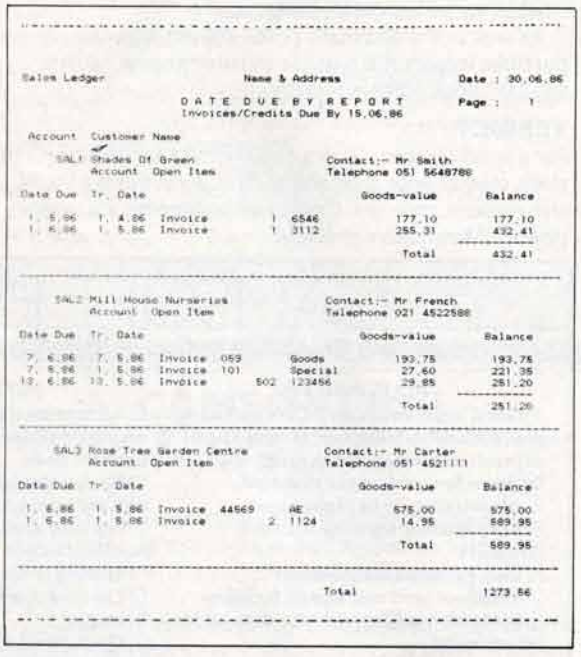
► There is no provision within the program to configure the printer – you'll probably need to use CP/M to set it for continuous stationery and compressed printing before commencing work each session.

► Many of the responses are single character but the system insists that these are in upper case making it advisable to set the Caps Lock for normal usage.

► File sizes are set by the user and, subject to available disc space, may be subsequently expanded.

► Excellent audit trails are printed at the time of entering the relevant batches.

► Any menu selections may be passworded by the user.



Sales Ledger — Name & Address — Date : 30.06.86

DATE DUE BY REPORT — Page : 1
Invoices/Credits Due By 15.06.86

Account	Customer Name					
SAL1	Shades Of Green			Contact:- Mr Smith		
	Account Open Item			Telephone 051 5648788		
Date Due	Tr. Date				Goods-value	Balance
1. 5.86	1. 4.86	Invoice	1 6546		177.10	177.10
1. 5.86	1. 5.86	Invoice	1 3112		255.31	432.41
				Total		432.41
SAL2	Mill House Nurseries			Contact:- Mr French		
	Account Open Item			Telephone 021 4522588		
Date Due	Tr. Date				Goods-value	Balance
7. 6.86	7. 5.86	Invoice 059		Goods	193.75	193.75
7. 6.86	1. 5.86	Invoice 101		Special	27.60	221.35
13. 6.86	13. 5.86	Invoice	502 123456		29.85	251.20
				Total		251.20
SAL3	Rose Tree Garden Centre			Contact:- Mr Carter		
	Account Open Item			Telephone 051 4521111		
Date Due	Tr. Date				Goods-value	Balance
1. 6.86	1. 5.86	Invoice 44569		AE	575.00	575.00
1. 6.86	1. 5.86	Invoice	2 1124		14.95	589.95
				Total		589.95
				Total		1273.56

● MAP's aged debtor printout can be passed straight to the person doing the chasing.

STOCK CONTROL

The fully fledged stock control system is normally linked to the invoicing facility. This gives automatic stock updates of sales and returns (by credit note) but also allows manual stock movement entries.

Accomodating up to 3 selling prices and 5 cost prices per item, it keeps track of average stock values and also copes with allocated stock and outstanding orders.

Stock may be categorised into 99 groups which will allow limited location records to be kept and reports may be printed selectively for nearly every conceivable purpose including price lists and stock checkers' sheets.

INVOICING

The invoicing module is linked to both stock control and sales ledger, so you can produce invoices very quickly if standard stock items are involved. But there's also flexibility to produce freehand entries and to override standard discounts.

Split VAT rates are coped with and nominal analysis is either taken from the stock records or manually entered for non stock items. Prices may be VAT inclusive or exclusive with automatic calculation.W

When entering stock items, the description and current stock are displayed on screen and it is permitted to "go negative" but a caution is given.

There is no separate procedure for credit notes which are created by inputting negative quantities. Unfortunately the document itself is then still headed "Invoice" although it is subsequently referred to on account enquiries etc as a credit note.

Full provision is made for accepting or rejecting each line of input and the invoice which is built up on screen is printed immediately. Unfortunately, although a good audit trail is printed at the end of the batch, there is no provision for printing an office copy of the invoice itself which means loading 2 part paper in the printer.

There is also no provision for offering a settlement discount which would need entering as a text item.

SALES LEDGER

As well as automatic entry of invoices created through the invoicing facility,it is possible to enter manually produced invoices or credit notes in mixed batches with full facility for analysis across up to 10 nominal accounts. VAT percentages are checked on input and a warning made if there is a discrepancy exceeding 10p, although the transaction may still be accepted.

There is no facility for entering adjustments by journal and these would need to be entered as dummy invoices or credits.

Cash posting and allocations are superb and allow entry of zero cash for cross allocation of credit notes to invoices. Settlement discounts are also catered for. Subsequent screen enquiries show allocated cash adjacent to its relevant transaction which is slightly confusing at first.

All transactions are retained until the period end when the allocated items are deleted and an audit trail automatically produced. A full transaction print may be taken with an option to print each account on a fresh page. This means full records can be kept of all transactions with some or all customers.

Customer details are comprehensive and reports available include aged debtors lists, reports of items which are due for settlement, credit limit exception reports, label prints and turnover reports.

Statements may be printed at any time for all live accounts or selectively. When amending or adding customer details a screen prompt advises how many records are in use and available and at the end of each session of entering new customers the file is re-indexed automatically, occasionally a time consuming process.

PURCHASE LEDGER

This is virtually identical to the Sales ledger but produces remittance advices instead of statements.These are produced on request after entering the payments in batches and the main menu indicates if there are any awaiting printing.There is no provision for recording the suppliers account reference or for printing it on the remittance.

NOMINAL LEDGER

This consists of 250 numerical account codes most of

which are pre-assigned and categorised into trading, expense, assets etc. With the exception of the main control accounts, most of these accounts may be renamed although they must remain in the existing categories. This system makes setting up fairly easy, but could prove slightly restrictive for some companies.

As well as an excellent journal posting system, there's a special routinefor prepayments and accruals – these are automatically reversed at the start of the next period. Trial balance prints show only those accounts with balances and a separate cost centre report is available together with a very impressive trading, profit & loss and balance sheet printing facility.

PERIOD ENDS

Each ledger has its own period end designated and will not allow posting of items dated after this date. As each period end is separately run, it is possible to update either or both the sale and purchase ledgers before updating the nominal and the system will prompt the user to hold batches in abeyance pending the subsequent update of the nominal.

VERDICT

An excellent suite with very few snags apart from initial installation – and the price includes one month's free support, available subsequently for £50 per year.

However it could prove over-complicated for a small business.

M.A.P. ACCOUNTS

Supplier: MAP Computer Systems (061 624-5662) ● £149

PLUS POINTS

- **Very comprehensive and professional package**
- **Provides excellent audit trails**
- **Ability to run the sales or purchase ledgers in a later period than the nominal**
- **Facility for prepayments and accruals with automatic reversals at period end**
- **Ability to print full management accounts**
- **It is possible to have a different data disc for each module**

MINUS POINTS

- **A single-drive 8256 cannot usefully run the entire package, only individual modules.**
- **Size of programs necessitates a lot of disc swapping**
- **Nominal journal entries do not carry narratives**
- **All normal responses need to be in upper case**
- **Some restrictions on nominal ledger construction**

COMPACT ACCOUNTS

Sales ledger ● Purchase ledger ● Invoicing ● Nominal ledger

This is a very comprehensive and professional package which has been in use on a wide range of micros for a number of years at many times the price now being asked for it on an Amstrad. This wide usage could prove very useful – data produced on the PCW could be transported subsequently to bigger machines as the suite is currently available for most 8 and 16 bit computers, all using the same data format.

And there are other ways in which the package offers great flexibility. You can set up and run more than one company from the same set of programs using different data discs. And you don't necessarily have to link the different parts of the package right from the start. If space was short it would be possible to run say the purchase and nominal ledgers linked, with the sales ledger and invoicing separately linked together and to update the nominal by journal entry from the batch audit trails produced. Fuller integration could follow later.

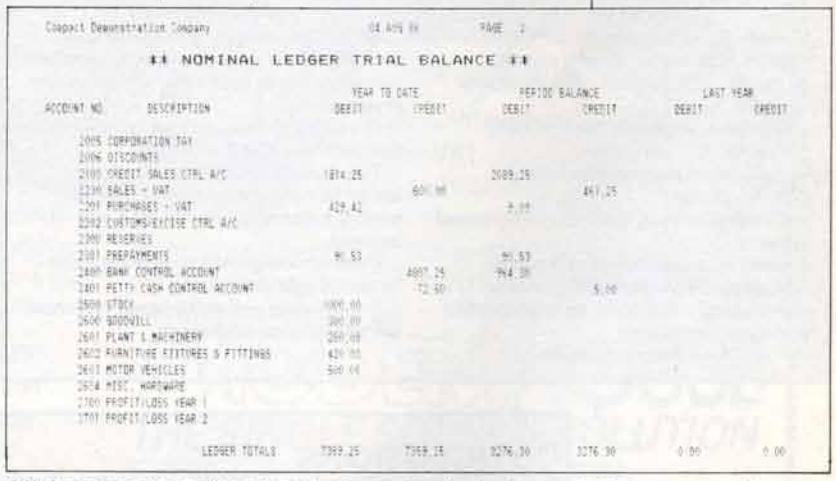
Unfortunately the sheer size of the package could cause problems. Intended originally for larger machines, it is supplied for the PCW on no less than FIVE discs and runs in Mallard Basic. This makes its operation slow and cumbersome at times.

Another drawback is that although the discs supplied can be copied the system will only run using the original set of discs. If any individual programs are corrupted the situation can probably be saved by "pipping" over from the backup copies – otherwise a new disc will have to be obtained from Compact at a nominal charge.

A consequence of this attempt to avoid piracy is that the programs have to be run from the A drive, not the M drive. On an 8512 this is not too serious a problem as data can be directed to drive B. But with a single-drive 8256 your data is held during normal operation in drive M. Although this gives a speed advantage, a machine crash or power failure will mean losing your entire session's work.

Fortunately the huge manual includes a 28 page section specifically addressed to operating the system on PCW machines, both single and dual disc. The software too includes routines to automatically back up discs at the end of the day and to set up the system at the start of a session – for example the PCW printer is automatically configured for continuous paper, a nice touch missing from most of the other packages.

Another excellent facility is the ability to create data files from all sections of the program for output to Supercalc 2, Multiplan, Wordstar and New Word. In other words you can move figures from your accounts directly into a spreadsheet or a letter.



Compact Demonstration Company 04 AUG 84 PAGE 2

** NOMINAL LEDGER TRIAL BALANCE **

ACCOUNT NO.	DESCRIPTION	YEAR TO DATE DEBIT	YEAR TO DATE CREDIT	PERIOD BALANCE DEBIT	PERIOD BALANCE CREDIT	LAST YEAR DEBIT	LAST YEAR CREDIT
1005	CORPORATION TAX						
1006	DISCOUNTS						
1100	CREDIT SALES CTRL A/C	1814.25		2089.25			
1230	SALES - VAT		600.00		447.25		
1201	PURCHASES - VAT	429.42		9.00			
1202	CUSTOMS/EXCISE CTRL A/C						
2300	RESERVES						
2301	PREPAYMENTS	91.53		91.53			
2400	BANK CONTROL ACCOUNT		4897.25	794.39			
2401	PETTY CASH CONTROL ACCOUNT		72.50		5.00		
2500	STOCK	1000.00					
2600	GOODWILL	200.00					
2601	PLANT & MACHINERY	250.00					
2602	FURNITURE FITTURES & FITTINGS	420.00					
2603	MOTOR VEHICLES	500.00					
2604	MISC. HARDWARE						
3700	PROFIT/LOSS YEAR 1						
3701	PROFIT/LOSS YEAR 2						
	LEDGER TOTALS	7389.25	7389.25	3276.30	3276.30	0.00	0.00

● This transaction listing is from a demonstration company already set up on the Compact program discs.

SALES LEDGER

This offers virtually all the features any small to medium-sized company could want:

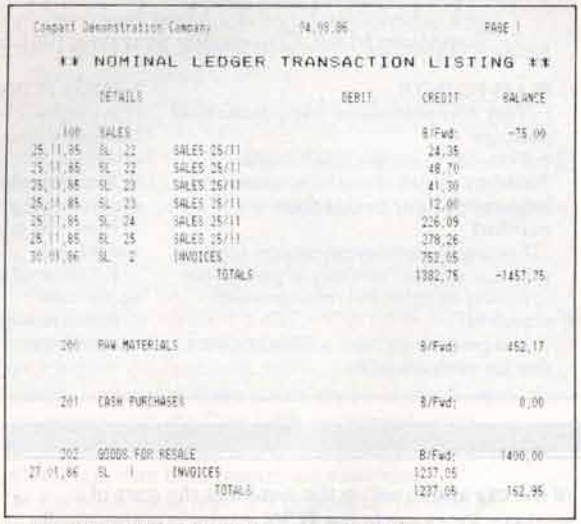
► Reports of customer accounts are printable in numeric or alphabetical order. (However the program sorts on only the first three letters of the account name.)

► VAT summaries showing all transactions can be printed at any time as can an automatically maintained control account.

► Customers may be classified by a combination of 100 rep codes and 100 area codes and reports can be selectively printed.

► There are facilities for the entry of invoices, credit notes, cash or journal adjustments in batches but cash must be allocated by a separate process and not as is more normal, during the cash posting routine.

► Negative input of any transaction is permitted which is sometimes useful for correcting errors.
► Statements for all or ranges of accounts with transactions can be printed at any time on preprinted stationery or a full transaction listing can be printed on plain paper for archive purposes.
► The system automatically produces a very detailed audit trail at the end of each batch and immediately updates all relevant ledgers.



Compact Demonstration Company 04.09.86 PAGE 1

** NOMINAL LEDGER TRANSACTION LISTING **

	DETAILS		DEBIT	CREDIT	BALANCE
100	SALES			B/Fwd:	-75.09
25.11.85	SL 22	SALES 25/11		24.35	
25.11.85	SL 22	SALES 25/11		48.70	
25.11.85	SL 23	SALES 25/11		41.30	
25.11.85	SL 23	SALES 25/11		12.00	
25.11.85	SL 24	SALES 25/11		226.09	
28.11.85	SL 25	SALES 25/11		378.26	
30.09.86	SL 2	INVOICES		752.65	
		TOTALS		1382.75	-1457.75
200	RAW MATERIALS			B/Fwd:	452.17
201	CASH PURCHASES			B/Fwd:	0.00
202	GOODS FOR RESALE			B/Fwd:	1400.00
27.01.86	SL 1	INVOICES		1237.05	
		TOTALS		1237.05	162.95

● Part of a trial balance from the Compact nominal ledger.

COMPACT

Supplier: Compact Software Ltd (0306 887373) ● £199.99

PLUS POINTS

⊞Audit trails are an auditor's dream
⊞Facility to export files direct to Supercalc 2, Multiplan, Wordstar and New Word
⊞Comes customised for the PCW machines
⊞Superb prepayment facility on purchase ledger
⊞Comprehensive VAT summaries and reports
⊞Can run a number of companies selectable from start of day menu
⊞Accounts could later be transported to bigger computers
⊞Very good documentation

MINUS POINTS

⊟Lot of disc-swapping required and comparatively slow changing operations
⊟You can't use back-up discs to run the program
⊟On an 8256, data can't be written to disc until the end of a session.
⊟The cash allocation on sales ledger has to be run separately from a cash posting batch and will not part pay invoices.
⊟Data for integrated programs must be on a single data disc.
⊟For invoices and statements you must use pre-printed stationery

PURCHASE LEDGER

This is broadly similar to the sales ledger with the addition of a payments facility with an option to print cheques or just remittance advices on preprinted stationery. There is also a superb prepayment facility to spread costs from an invoice over up to 36 periods with the charge being automatically posted to the nominal ledger at each month end.

There is no option to enter a payment due date or to note discounts available but it is possible to print creditors' lists for overdue balances only or the accounts may be identified within up to 100 classifications for selective reports.

INVOICING

Invoices or credit notes can be produced on preprinted stationery using the sales ledger details with an optional link to a very comprehensive product file – this gives facilities for profit and turnover reporting on a customer or product basis.

The invoice is built up on the screen with full editing facilities available and is immediately printed. At the end of a batch the audit trail is printed and all ledgers updated.

Standard discounts may be set up on the product file and either accepted or amended during the invoicing production – there is however no provision for settlement discount which could only be entered as text.

NOMINAL LEDGER

This part of the system is again powerful and flexible. You can lay out a nominal ledger using any number of numerical account codes and with a facility to group the accounts in up to 100 user defined headings.

Reports are available in either full or summarised form with full quarterly, monthly or annual budgetting. Full journal posting routines with transaction descriptions are supported with a facility to set up standard monthly journals – these could be used to cover standing orders, for example.

Any account can be displayed on the screen or printed and a full transaction listing can be produced at any time.

VERDICT

An excellent, fully professional package. The main drawback is that it's almost too big to run comfortably on a PCW. Even on an 8512, much cumbersome disc-swapping is involved. Probably best for someone planning to upgrade their hardware in the forseeable future.

CONCLUSIONS

The Sagesoft is the easiest package to install and will probably cope adequately with the requirements of a fairly small business with a static customer and supplier base. The comprehensive instructions and tutorial make it a system which could easily be installed by anyone with very limited book-keeping or computer knowledge.

For someone prepared to put a bit more effort into the original setting up and with rather wider requirements, particularly for a business which needs a comprehensive yet easy to use invoicing/stock control package, the Camsoft system is more likely to prove of value. While it is still a fairly basic package which runs without the need of constant disc-swapping, it is likely to provide good service for most small businesses.

For a fully professional package for the growing business which prefers to run its account through to trial balance it is very difficult to choose between the MAP and Compact packages. They are both obviously full specification systems squeezed down to fit the PCW and consequently require rather a lot of disc-swapping to fit in all the available facilities. The MAP system seems to be more modern in its approach and, provided the restrictions in the layout of the nominal ledger do not prove to be too much of a handicap does, I think, just have the edge over Compact. It is very difficult to find any major criticisms of the Compact package – indeed its upgradability and ultra-flexible file structure could make it invaluable for some users. But it is somewhat longer in the tooth than MAP and, being written in BASIC, also suffers in its speed of operation, as well as being slightly more expensive.

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...or Tuesday...or Thursday... the sooner you send off the coupon, the sooner you'll have the entire knowledge of the world at your fingertips. The Voyager range of Modems has full BABT approval and is fully compatible with just about any micro throughout the world. And you could pay twice the price for a modem and still not get these features:

• Multi Speed – including 300/300, 1200/75, 75/1200 full duplex, and 1200/1200 half duplex • Full function LED display • More software support than any other Modem – and the best.

The Voyager PCW COMM+ software gives you: Auto Dial/Auto Answer • A full Communications Processor rather than a "Comms Program" • The most powerful Amstrad communications software • Recommended by all the leading network operators • Text and Telex editor and formatter • Prestel/Viewdata emulation with Graphics • Hazeltine/ADM/ADDS/ANSI/VT 52 Emulations • Modem/Modem 4/Modem 7 file transfer • "Versatility is amazing/Well done/Best Option for PCW so far" (Micronet review 22.8.86).

With Voyager 7 you can link Prestel, Micronet, Viewfax, Amsnet, BT Gold, Microlink — and most other data bases — and for 98% of the country it'll cost you only around 40p per hour (cheap rate) to run (Assuming Prestel local call access).

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Gemini PROMOTING PERSONAL

INTERGem

THE MULTI-STANDARD DISK INTERFACE FOR THE AMSTRAD PCW

£99.95 inc.
or with 400K D/S drive ready to run £199.95 inc.

INTRODUCTION The AMSTRAD DISK DRIVE ADAPTOR ('InterGem') will allow the fitting of any BBC Microcomputer compatible disk drive to the AMSTRAD PCW 8256, in place of the second disk drive. The drive(s) may be 5.25", 3.5" or 3"; 80, or 40/80 track; half-height and with or without power supply. 'InterGem', which should NOT be confused with other inferior products which it clearly out-performs, is easily fitted via the front panel which covers the slot for the second drive, and where the Amstrad label is affixed.

'InterGem' offers an additional 720 kilobytes of storage space, four times the amount offered in a single drive system. It allows a 5.25"/3.5" drive to mimic the AMSTRAD PCW 8256 second drive.

HARDWARE 'InterGem' is supplied in the form of a PCB, mounted on a replacement front panel. The PCB of 'InterGem' has the necessary connectors for linkage to the PCW 8256 second drive connectors. Connections are also available for the linkage of a BBC compatible disk drive WITHOUT POWER SUPPLY, via a socket on the 'InterGem' front panel.

SOFTWARE The software supplied is on 3" disk, and enables the user to configure a 5.25" or 3.5" BBC compatible drive to accept CP/M disks in double density format for nearly 80 other machines.

'InterGem' can also be used in the same way as the 3" PCW second drive, with LOCOSCRIPT and CP/M. Software is provided to enable the PCW, via 'InterGem', to READ FROM and WRITE TO machines running MS-DOS/PC-DOS, including the IBM PC/PC-XT formats and compatibles, (and APRICOT computers using 3.5" drives), and the BBC Microcomputer using a double density DFS (e.g. Watford DDFS, Solidisk DDFS, Acorn ADFS, OPUS D-DOS, etc.). In addition to this software a program is included which will allow the transfer of information on single density BBC disks to double density (using a BBC).

This package also comes complete with a comprehensive, user-friendly manual which explains the installation and use of 'InterGem' and accompanying software.

IMPORTANT ADVANTAGES OF 'InterGem' The cost of 'InterGem', plus a new 40/80 track, double side 5.25" disk without power supply, is comparable to the cost and installation of the Amstrad PCW 3" second drive.

One of the chief advantages is the cost and availability of the media, as double density 5.25" disks are at least a third of the cost of double density 3" disks (CF2-DD). In effect, a company using 50 or more disks would recover its outlay for 'InterGem' PLUS the drive, because of the swingeing price differential between 5.25" and 3" disks. (If you can get them!)

Importantly too, there, is a great deal of commercial software available in CP/M on 5.25" disks, which the installation of 'InterGem' would allow the user to take advantage of on his AMSTRAD PCW 8256, where that software is not available on 3" disk. Many companies and eductional establishments with information stored on 5.25"/3.5" disks, in CP/M, MS-DOS/PC-DOS, or ACORN 1770 DFS (or equilavent) formats, (with readily available 5.25" disk drives), would find the AMSTRAD DISK DRIVE ADAPTOR an invaluable asset if they wished to take advantage of the AMSTRAD PCW 8256 and its facilities.

FREE with InterGem comes the classic SPACE INVADERS, the FIRST arcade action game ever to be written for the Amstrad PCW

Are you frustrated with this print quality ? or indeed, even this ?

NEW for the PCW! £19.95 inc.

FONTGem

8 ALTERNATIVE TYPEFACES IN NLQ!

'FontGem' for the PCW is a revolutionary piece of software that will enhance your printed Locoscript documents (and all other text files) beyond belief! Simply install 'FontGem' on your work disk, and choose which super business font you require from the menu. From then on, your PCW printer will use the font you have chosen, and will respond, automatically to style and emphasis changes marked in your text. Please note that 'FontGem' is a low level software patch to CP/M, and will therefore work with ALL your software.

PRODUCTIVITY FOR THE AMSTRAD PCW

DATAGem

£39.95 inc.

THE DEFINITIVE DATA BASE FILING SYSTEM

OUTLINE In view of the incredible success of the Amstrad PCW8256, and now the PCW8512, the market for suitable serious software to complement the primary word processing function is expanding rapidly. The first reaction of most software houses in their anxiety to capture their slice of that market is to look to existing products and re-compile their source code on the Amstrad computer. Any software technician will agree that this cannot result in 'optimised' code, and in most cases, this procedure will not always allow the exploitation of the superb features of the Amstrad PCW, such as the RAM disk, the printer and the 2nd optional double-density disk drive if fitted (although standard on the PCW8512).

Gemini have written 'DataGem' *SPECIFICALLY* for the Amstrad. It uses *ALL* the features of the hardware, and uses advanced 'hashing' techniques to provide the *FASTEST* sorts and searches. It also boasts features that represent the state-of-art of today's databases, not those written years ago which were always an attempt just to replace the ubiquitous card index.

BBC ROM VERSION (£39.95 also)
Please enquire

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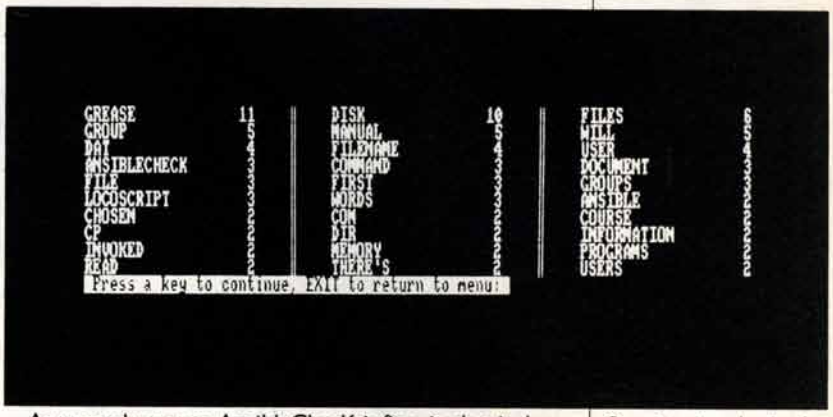
AnsibleCheck

£19.95 ● Ansible Information

This is a wordcounter and proofreader for LocoScript documents. It can read from any group of a LocoScript disc, and counts at about 3000 words per minute. Proofreading, in AnsibleCheck terms, does not mean spell checking, but just looking for adjacent words that have been duplicated by mistake mistake. Only LocoScript documents can be processed, not ordinary ASCII files from other wordprocessors.

Also included free (although like lunches, there is no such thing as a free program) is *Grease* – a utility aimed at authors which analyses the word usage in a document. It ranks all the words by frequency of use, skipping certain predefined common ones like "the", and shows you how much you are overworking pet phrases. The list of words that Grease ignores is itself a LocoScript document and can be modified to suit specific applications.

The programs come on a disc which automatically boots CP/M and runs AnsibleCheck, to make swapping to and from LocoScript faster. The documentation is adequate and friendly, including an intruiging explanation of why Grease is called Grease.



As a wordcounter, AnsibleCheck is fine, in that it does indeed count words quite effectively. However, if you discount the "free" Grease, £19.95 does sound a bit steep.

Grease in action, showing that the most used word in the READ.ME file is, appropriately, grease.

RANGE OF FEATURES ■■□□□ OVERALL SPEED ■■■■□
EASE OF USE ■■■■□ DOCUMENTATION ■■■□□
8000 PLUS VALUE VERDICT ■■■□□

Better Spelling

£12.95 ● School Software

This is the first of a wide range of educational software that is being made available on the PCW, having been previously established on other machines.

Better Spelling is a spelling course aimed at the 8 to adult age group. It is a series of well organised lessons, each one emphasising a particular point such as irregular plurals, or the i-before-e-except-after-c-(well-usually) rule. Educationally it's very strong, but practically it is rather drab. The screen layout is just simple text, which doesn't immediately grab your attention. However, in a classroom situation that is probably not important.

The whole package has a ragged feel to it – it runs from BASIC, but there are no instructions at all included on how to start it going. Further, there are a few strange features of the programming: for example, when prompted to spell a word, you are only allowed to type one character more than the correct answerhas. The result of this is that if you are trying to type the plural of "cactus" (incorrectly), you simply can't type "cactuses" in, because "cacti" only has five letters.

So to sum up, the educational design of the spelling

lessons is very good, but the weak programming means that some classroom supervision will be needed.

The range of topics covered

RANGE OF FEATURES ■■■■□ OVERALL SPEED ■■■□□
EASE OF USE ■■□□□ DOCUMENTATION □□□□□
8000 PLUS VALUE VERDICT ■■■□□

Rotate

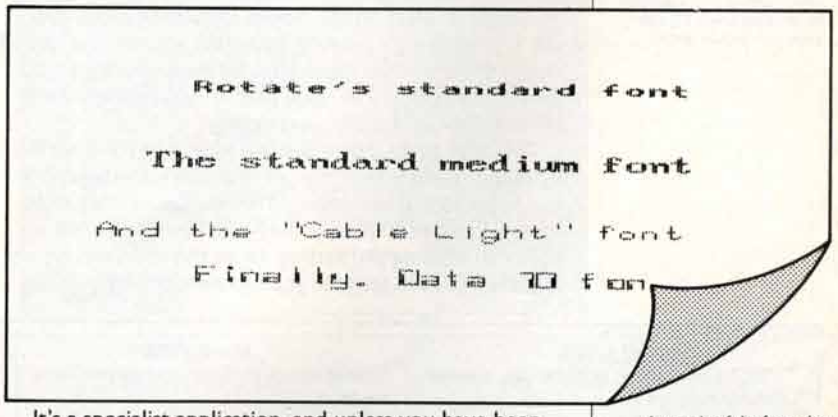
£24.95 ● Logicom

This is a simple little program which rotates your printed text through 90 degrees on the page, so that you can take advantage of the larger paper width. It's particularly useful for things like spreadsheets, which can require very wide printouts to fit everything on.

Rotate only prints ordinary text files, it doesn't actually modify the printer control software. This means that you can't just use the ordinary "print" command in your application program, you have to output the text to a text file first, then use Rotate to print that file out. Therefore if your spreadsheet doesn't have an "output to disc" function, you won't be able to use Rotate.

Because the PCW printer wasn't designed to print rotated text, Rotate can't print in the same text style as it normally produces. Instead there are a choice of four other fonts, none of which look entirely natural.

There are a fair number of functions to deal with, including setting the page dimensions and text font, so all in all printing rotated text is a little more involved than it ought to be. However, the program is controlled by simple menus and has quite a good manual.

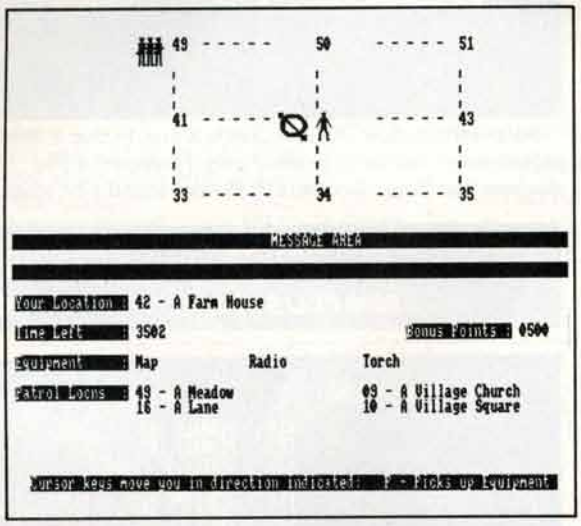


It's a specialist application, and unless you have been cursing your narrow paper in the past you won't miss much.

A sample of the fonts that Rotate can print in

RANGE OF FEATURES ■■■□□ OVERALL SPEED ■■□□□
EASE OF USE ■■■□□ DOCUMENTATION ■■■■□
8000 PLUS VALUE VERDICT ■■■□□

PLAY TIME



The extremely unexciting ▶ screen from *SAS Raid*. Nothing moves.

The enemy patrol

This is supposed to be you standing next to a dinghy

S.A.S. RAID

£14.95 ● CRL

Oh dear. This one's about as enjoyable as an SAS training exercise and a good deal less exciting. In fact it looks suspiciously like a rush job aimed at snapping up a couple thousand sales before too many other games hit the PCW market.

Picture on screen a miniscule, totally motionless, stick man. That's you. Your mission is to recover some plans from a castle without being caught by patrols of randomly appearing enemy forces, represented on screen by what appears to be a miniature dancing troupe. Totally motionless.

By pressing the cursor keys an onscreen message tells you that you are moving through various locations. It's as well the message is there, because there's no other indication of anything happening apart from the occasional appearance of (motionless) objects which you can pick up.

By finding the right object you can reach the castle where you face various challenging puzzles before you can discover the plans. For example, I was asked to supply a four-letter word which meant the opposite of 'up'.

If you don't know the answer to that one you'll probably find the game enjoyable – so buy it if you dare. Who Dares Cringes.

PLUSES	MINUSES
⊞Pass	⊟Totally lacks atmosphere ⊟And challenge

GRAPHICS ■□□□□ LASTING APPEAL ■□□□□
ADDICTIVENESS ■□□□□ VALUE VERDICT ■□□□□

GAMES RATINGS

We're using two slightly different ratings systems according to whether a game falls more into the 'adventure' or 'action' categories. Our main differentiating criteria is whether play is controlled by typed-in text commands (an adventure) or more directly by pressing single keys (an action or 'arcade' game).

GRAHAM GOOCH's TEST CRICKET

£19.95 ● Audiogenic

It's the perfect game for a green screen – grass, more grass and grass stained whites. The simulation lets you play 40, 55 or 60 over matches and full two innings games. Initially it's set up for Australia and England but the team names and players can be changed to what you like.

The game plays in two modes, simulation and arcade, the former being a relaxing game that you can just sit and watch and the latter requiring a lot more participation. One or two players can take part, the computer having nine skill levels in a one player game.

The basic game screen shows a view down the wicket from above the bowler's head, with the wicketkeeper and a slip behind the wicket. The two teams are picked from a squad of 20 players, each one having different ability at bowling and batting. Once the team and type of match have been selected you can start playing.

In simulation mode you just have to choose the tactics of the batsman and which side of the wicket your field should attack when bowling. The arcade mode requires you to time the shot when batting and hit two keys alternately to improve the bowler's performance when he's running in. If the ball is hit off the sides of the screens an outfield action screen appears where the ball is automatically fielded or goes for four.

All the usual rules apply with LBW, catches, run out and clean bowled dismissals, bowlers tiring in long spells, a new ball, declarations and follow ons. The graphics are nicely animated and the whole game well thought out and presented. The computer can provide tough opposition and the two player games are plenty of fun. Will appeal to all cricket fans and a few more besides.

PLUSES	MINUSES
⊞Good animation of batsman, bowler and outfield action. ⊞Computer can provide tough opposition. ⊞Great fun with two players. ⊞Choice of arcade and simulation modes.	⊟Not much variety in what you have to do. ⊟Doesn't offer much to non-cricket fans. ⊟It's expensive

GRAPHICS ■■■■□ LASTING APPEAL ■■■□□
ADDICTIVENESS ■■■■□ VALUE VERDICT ■■■□□

BLACKSTAR

£14.95 ● CRL

The difference between this and the other CRL release SAS Raid is akin to that between Stilton cheese and Tesco's processed. This one's the Stilton.

Blackstar's been available for several years on various micros under the fuller title *Castle Blackstar* but this version is said by CRL to have been updated. It's a straightforward text adventure with a traditional fantasy scenario – gleaming swords, strange statues, impenetrable forests and the like.

Your aim is to enter and explore the mysterious castle and underlying caverns to recover a 'power orb' which has been requested of you by the somewhat unusually dressed woman who features on the packaging.

Commands have to be kept pretty simple, but you can at least link them with the word 'and' as in 'Take lamp and light it'. The program's responses are not particularly sophisticated either – it has the annoying habit of saying things like 'I don't quite follow you' without making clear whether this is because a word you've entered isn't in its vocabulary or what.

These limitations are made up for by the game's size and atmosphere. There seem to be around 200 locations, most of them described in enough detail to be convincing.

The first problem you encounter is how to get into the castle. The solution is not difficult, except for the fact that most attempts at movement in the early locations result in you getting lost in the surrounding woodland. This area actually contains some important clues, but as the instructions advise, you're better to stay clear until you can map it – by dropping objects in each location.

```
Base of portcullis                                    Score 17/0113

Castle front (north)
You are at the northern corner of the castle front.
>s

Castle front
You are in front of the castle, next to a drawbridge. The drawbridge is held up by
thick rope an inch thick, making the moat uncrossable.
>shoot rope

I don't quite follow you. Could you re-phrase that.
>shoot arrow

The arrow passes through the rope holding up the drawbridge and with a huge crash it
falls across the moat.
>w

Base of portcullis
You are at the base of a great iron portcullis, it looks much too heavy for you to
lift. Above the portcullis is a message and through the grating you can see the castle
courtyard.
>read message

    " We welcome you to Castle Blackstar and hope your visit is a short and painful
one! "
>
```

The castle courtyard yields an important object which will allow you to begin exploration of the seemingly endless underground caverns accessed from the bottom of a well.

Blackstar may be showing its age a little, and certainly it's less sophisticated than the Infocom titles. But it's still a very worthy adventure in the classic mould, and a thoroughly pleasant way to spend an evening or two.

PLUSES	MINUSES
⊞ Large number of locations with plenty of variety	⊟ Program's responses can be unhelpful.
⊞ Pleasing traditional atmosphere	
⊞ Masses to discover and do	

ATMOSPHERE	■■■■□	CHALLENGE	■■■■□
INTERACTION	■■□□□	VALUE VERDICT	■■■■□

FAIRLIGHT

£14.95 ● The Edge

You may already be aware of the reputation of the remarkable *Batman*, the first arcade game for the PCWs. Hot onto the streets a few weeks later comes another arcade adventure with an excellent reputation. Once again it features 3D graphics, but that is where the similarity between the two games ends.

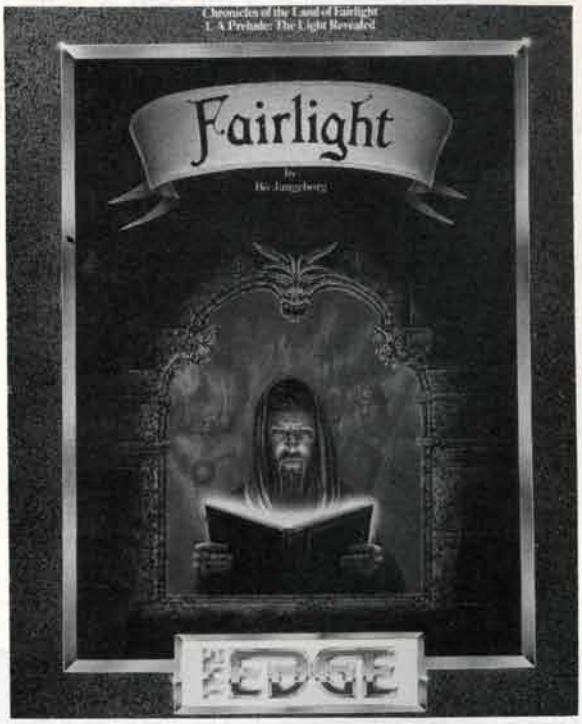
The games is set in a castle where Isvar, the hero whose part you play, has been imprisoned. To escape he must find the Book of Light and take it to the wizard who lured him into the castle. Finding the book will involve solving many puzzles and fighting the castle's deadly inhabitants.

There are helmeted guards who patrol some areas, attacking when you get too close, trolls, wraiths, globes, plants and whirlwinds. They can all prove dangerous but can be dealt with or manipulated once you understand their behaviour. The castle has many different locations including open courtyards, dungeons, towers and a cave system. Scattered around are objects that can be picked up, up to five at one time if they're not too heavy.

Objects serve many purposes and experimentation is the only guide. Food and drink will fortify you and the use of a key is obvious – other things like a scroll, barrel or gold you'll need to work out for yourself.

The graphics, if not quite up to the *Batman* standard, are nonetheless impressive and convey the eerie foreboding of the castle. But when several moving characters are on screen the action slows down considerably.

The puzzles will keep you exploring and thinking for many a long hour, but you'll also have to do your share of fighting against the castle's formidable array of guardians. Ideal if you're looking for the mental challenge of an adventure, combined with a more realistic feeling of exploration.



PLUSES	MINUSES
⊞ Clear, detailed 3D graphics.	⊟ Screen slowdown with several moving characters on screen.
⊞ Good atmosphere created by graphics and instructions.	⊟ May not be easy to get into at first.
⊞ Lots of puzzling and thinking to do.	
⊞ Good range of objects and ways to use them.	

GRAPHICS	■■■■□	LASTING APPEAL	■■■■□
ADDICTIVENESS	■■■□□	VALUE VERDICT	■■■■□

WORDCOUN

A valuable LocoScript aid anyone can type in

Old LocoScripts

Owners of early PCW8256s, which came with LocoScript version 1.0, should have been able to get a new, amended version of LocoScript from Amstrad. Quickly check which version you have – do this by pressing **f7** in the LocoScript Disc Management screen, and you should see a menu on which the last item is "Make ASCII file". If your f7 menu ends "Direct Printing", then you've got an old version and you won't be able to use this word counter program. In which case you should immediately send your master disc back to Amstrad for a free upgrade!

Boffin note

If you're familiar with Microsoft BASIC, you'll find the version that runs on the PCW has a few differences. Most of the simple commands work as usual, but Mallard BASIC (as it is called) has a special way of reading and writing disc files.

Unfortunately, if you bought your PCW recently, you will have discovered that Amstrad have decided to cut their costs by not giving you the manual that describes how to use your BASIC system. You won't need it to follow this article, but if you do want to learn more about Mallard BASIC then you can buy the manual for £9.95 from *Locomotive Software Ltd., 1 South Street, Dorking, Surrey RH4 2DY (Tel. 0306 887902).* Alternatively, for £4 extra Locomotive will provide a disc with extra information and examples.

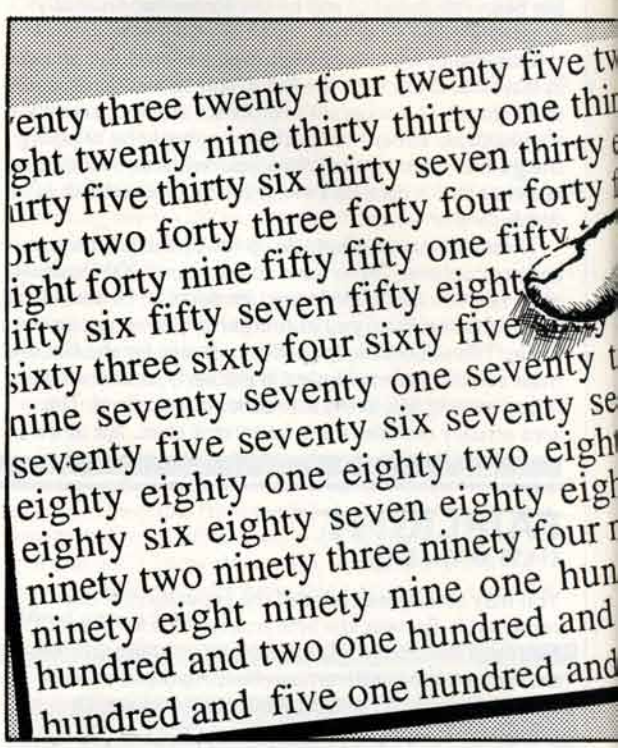
One of the most often repeated complaints about LocoScript is that there is no way of telling how many words you have written. This is particularly important for professional journalists or authors, who often have to write to a strict word limit. But a word-count can be an invaluable aid for other users too.

Usually you would have to invest in a commercial word-processing package to be able to get a word counter, but here's a way of adding that ability to LocoScript for free! All it takes is a simple program which anyone can type in by following the instructions on these pages. It will count the actual number of words, rather than "typists' words" of six characters each.

If you've never used your PCW for anything other than running LocoScript then prepare yourself for an illuminating experience – it can also operate as a powerful computer running the programming language BASIC and an operating system called CP/M. Maybe you've had a quick look at the discs that came with the PCW, or the last half of the LocoScript manual where it talks about CP/M, and hastily put them in the back of a cupboard with a shudder. Well, while this isn't the time or place for a lengthy tutorial, we're going to describe everything that you need to do to get the word counter up and running, even if you've never heard of BASIC or CP/M before.

Loading BASIC

First of all, here's how to get the PCW to run BASIC. Find the discs that originally came with the PCW, or your copies of them if you have taken back-ups as you should have done, and look for side 2 which is labelled "CP/M PLUS". Now turn the PCW on, or press **[SHIFT]+[EXTRA]+[EXIT]** to reset it, and insert the disc into the top disc drive with the "CP/M PLUS" label facing towards the screen. After a few seconds, the disc will stop whirring and the screen will say "A>". In case you haven't realised, you are now inside CP/M – and you never knew how easy it was. Now type **BASIC [RETURN]**, and the disc will whirr again, print out a message about "Mallard-80 BASIC", and eventually stop with the message "Ok". Now you are inside BASIC; try typing



PRINT "Hello world!" [RETURN]

and you will see

Hello world!
Ok

appear on the screen. If you know something about BASIC, feel free to play around a little. You can leave BASIC at any time by typing **SYSTEM [RETURN]**. This will return to the CP/M prompt "A>".

The word counter program

If you don't understand BASIC, don't want to either, and just want to get a working word counter that you can use, then here's what to do.

Start BASIC up as described above, and you'll be at the familiar "Ok" prompt again. Now type in the program listing itself(see box for instructions on typing in).

Once the listing is complete, before you do anything else find a work disc that you can write to and put it in the disc drive. It's not a bad idea to use one of your LocoScript discs, so you can keep the word count program with your documents, and it cuts down the number of different discs you have floating around too.

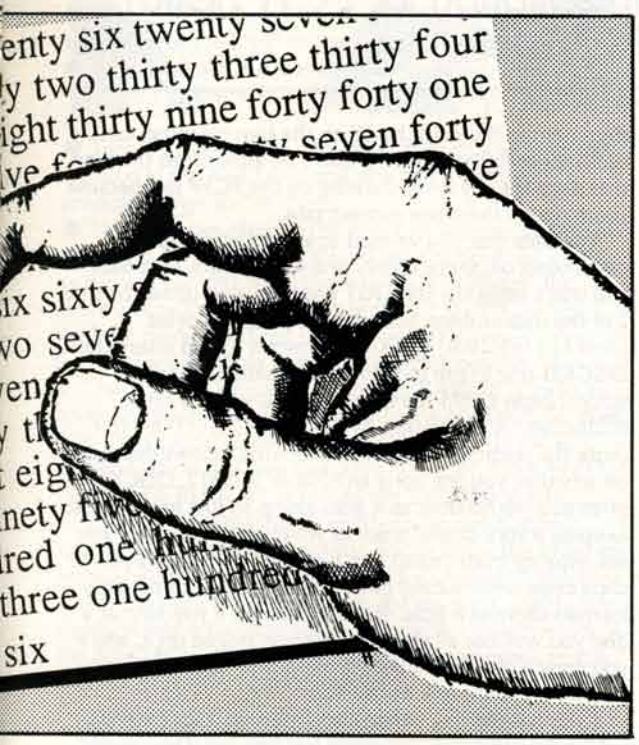
Type **SAVE "WRDCOUNT" [RETURN]**. Now your typing is safely saved on disc. Incidentally, if you are using a LocoScript disc, you will see the program appear as the document WRDCOUNT.BAS in the first group of the disc when you run LocoScript, and you mustn't move it from that first group.

How to type a listing in

First you have to load in Mallard BASIC, instructions for which we've printed elsewhere. Then copy out each line in the listing very carefully, including the line number, and press **[RETURN]** at the end of each line.

When you've finished, type **LIST [RETURN]** and the whole program will appear on the screen. Check it, and if any lines are wrong you can correct them with the line editor. For example, if the mistake was in line 100 you would type **EDIT 100 [RETURN]**, and use the cursor keys and delete keys to fix the line. Press **[RETURN]** when the line is correct. If you have mistyped a line number, so that a line appears in the wrong sequence, just type the incorrect line number, then **[RETURN]**, which effectively deletes the line. Then retype the line with the correct number.

NTER!



Now it's time to check that you typed in the program properly. Read the section below on using the word counter, and try it out with any small LocoScript document that you have. After this, make sure you have saved any corrections you may have made to your listing, and type **SYSTEM [RETURN]** to finish with BASIC.

```
B>basic

Mallard-80  BASIC with Jetsam   Version 1.29
(c) Copyright 1984  Locomotive Software Ltd
All rights reserved

31597 free bytes

Ok
run "wrdcount"
File name? myfile.bas

Line 18

 65 words counted in myfile.bas
Ok
system

B>
```

● What the screen should look like after a successful run.

THE PROGRAM LISTING

```
10 INPUT "File name";file$
20 OPEN "I",1,file$
30 PRINT
40 wds%=0:lno%=0
50 WHILE NOT EOF(1)
60 inwd%=0:lno%=lno%+1
70 LINE INPUT #1,line$
80 PRINT CHR$(13);"Line";lno%;
90 FOR i=1 TO LEN(line$)
100 c$=MID$(line$,1,1)
110 IF c$=" " AND inwd% THEN wds%=wds%+1:inwd%=0
120 IF c$<>" " THEN inwd%=-1
130 NEXT i
140 IF inwd% THEN wds%=wds%+1
150 WEND
160 PRINT:PRINT
170 PRINT wds%;"words counted in ";file$
180 CLOSE
```

Using the word counter

You'll be relieved to know that you won't have to go through all that typing again every time you want to run the word counter. However, there is a catch: BASIC runs from CP/M, and LocoScript doesn't, so you can't run the word-counter directly from Locoscript. Here's what you should do. The process starts from the Disc Management Screen in LocoScript, so start up LocoScript if you haven't already. Place the document selection highlight bar over the document that you wish to word count, and press **[f7]** (the "Modes" menu). Select the *Make ASCII file* option, press **[ENTER]**, and you are prompted to pick a document group for the result. Put the highlight bar in the first group of the A: disc, and press **[ENTER]**. On the menu that now pops up, name the file, select *Page image file*, and press **[ENTER]** again. Now you will see the new document appear on the document index.

Now remove the LocoScript disc and start up BASIC as you did earlier. Put the disc that you saved the word count program on back in the disc drive, and type

RUN "WRDCOUNT"

You will see the prompt asking you for the name of the file to be word counted – if your Locoscript document is on a different disc put that disc into the drive and type the name that you gave the ASCII file when you created it (NOT the original LocoScript document). Press **[RETURN]**, and the program will complete the process.

Finally, next time that you run LocoScript don't forget to delete the ASCII file that you have just created. This isn't needed any more, and only eats up valuable disc space.

Boffin Note

You've seen WRDCOUNT totting up ordinary ASCII files, but if you've understood the program listing you will see that it can process any characters that are accepted by the BASIC *LINE INPUT* statement. This means that you can count *WordStar* document files, for instance, although the resulting word total may be an overestimate by a few percent. The problem is caused by input lines longer than 255 characters – fairly common for *WordStar* document paragraph.

What to do if it goes wrong

It's more than likely, no matter how meticulously you copied the listing out, that the first time you run the program it won't work as just described. If something strange happens, read the error message carefully; it probably says something like "Syntax error in 100". List the program out (using **LIST**), and carefully check the screen listing against the original in the magazine. The line number, 100 in the example, tells you which line is wrong. Correct the error either by retyping the line wholesale or by using the line editor as described in the "How to type a listing in" box, and then type **RUN** again. Hopefully this time everything should have worked as planned, but if not go on correcting lines and re-RUNning until it works. Finally, save the correct version again (with **SAVE "WRDCOUNT"**).

Use your operating system to keep your system operating!

How to avoid a slipped disc

Worried about doing your back up? Try this prescription for PCW health care from our very own Dr Ben Taylor MD FRCS MBE.

If you are anything like me, the first thing you did on unpacking your shiny new PCW was to totally ignore all the dire warnings about making working copies of your discs and to plough straight into LocoScript using the Amsoft master disc. Of course Amstrad don't actually provide any blank discs with the machine to enable you to follow their advice, but if you're still regularly using master discs without backup then you're taking a big risk. This month we're going to explain some of the often overlooked basics of working with floppy discs, and also throw in a few techniques to make running programs from CP/M a little easier.

Different types of disc

The PCW 8256 uses discs called CF-2 discs. These can be put into the disc drive label side outermost, but either way up. You can read and write to either side of the disc, and each side acts quite independently of the other, which means that you will have to format both sides of the disc separately before you can use a new CF-2 disc.

The PCW 8512 also uses CF-2 discs in its top drive (called "A"), but takes identical-looking CF-2DD discs in its lower drive ("B"). These discs can go in the B drive either way, but once you have decided which way then you can't use the other side – you might as well think of them as being single sided discs, and cross out the other side's label to remind you. The B drive can usually read CF-2 discs, but cannot write to them. The A drive can never read or write CF-2DD discs, so try and keep the types of disc separated in your drawer.

When you're faced with a blank disc, before you can use it you have to "format" it – this is like saying you have to rule the lines on a piece of paper before you can write onto it.

Tech Note

The B drive has two disc heads, and stores data on both sides of a CF-2DD disc at once with only one disc directory for both sides. Formatting with DISCKIT processes both sides at once, so if you try to format the "other" side of the disc, you will erase the first side too, even if that side has the write protect tab set!

Getting your back-up

The warnings you see with software about keeping copies of all discs you use are not just put about by a cynical cartel of disc manufacturers out to boost sales. The golden rule is to ask yourself whenever you finish using your PCW, "If I couldn't ever use again the discs I am putting away now, do I care?" If you don't care, then fine, but otherwise you ought to make "back-up" copies of all your discs.

Losing your disc is far more common than you think; no matter how reliable any computer is, your pet Labrador might still run amok with your new bestseller novel disc. Or your elbow might have an argument with a cup of coffee. Or, a disc may just decide to develop a bad sector.

You're particularly at risk if you are working with discs created on someone else's PCW – a slight difference in alignment in the drive heads on the two machines can cause write-fail errors. And don't be fooled into thinking that discs are safe from chewing by the PCW just because you have set the write protect tabs.

For discs that you've used to store LocoScript documents on, there is only one way to back up a disc, and that's using the DISCKIT program that comes on side 2 of the master discs. Start the PCW up (or press [SHIFT]+[EXTRA]+[EXIT] to restart it) and insert the DISCKIT disc in the top drive, with side 2 facing the screen. Now CP/M starts up, and you will see the distinctive "A>" prompt. Type DISCKIT [RETURN] (note the meaning – Disc kit), and what follows depends on whether you are using an 8256 or an 8512. DISCKIT gives you instructions as it goes along, so just follow those keeping a very careful track of which disc is which if you are copying from one to another. DISCKIT allows you to copy onto unformatted new discs, since it automatically formats them as it goes. Remember that if you format a disc you will lose all the data that was stored on it, and if you copy a disc then any data previously on the disc you are copying onto will be lost too.

If you are copying particularly valuable data, then after you've copied a disc you might feel happier if you verify it; select DISCKIT's VERIFY option, and it will check that the disc you have copied indeed contains the same data as the original.

Living in peace with your discs

All that has gone before is equally applicable to LocoScript users and CP/M users. Now we're going to look in some more detail at how to get the best performance from your discs using CP/M.

The PCW machines have, in addition to the floppy disc drives built into the monitor unit, a "RAM disc". This is a section of computer memory that is reserved inside the PCW to act like a floppy disc. Files can be stored and retrieved from it, and it is referred to by CP/M as "M:", as compared to A: or B: for the floppy discs. This means that on a PCW8256, you really have two disc drives, and three on an 8512.

Reading and writing on the M: drive is a lot faster than to the A: and B: drives, because there are no mechanical motors to run up to speed. By transferring your programs to M: and running them from there, you can speed up programs that make a lot of use of discs, and also cut out all that annoying disc swapping on a PCW8256.

Many commercial programs already make use of this facility automatically. If you've got a big package that still runs from ordinary floppy discs, then here's how to give it go-faster stripes:

- Load in CP/M as normal, so that you see the prompt A> on the screen
- Clear out your M: drive by typing ERA M:*.* [RETURN], and replying Y to the question "ERASE M:*.* (Y/N)?" (Make very very sure you type M:*.*, NOT A:*.*, or you might lose your floppy disc contents – you can guard against this by setting the write-protect tab.)
- Find your CP/M work disc that has the file PIP.COM on it (the original is on side 2 of the discs that come with the PCW)
- Put it in the floppy disc drive, and type PIP [RETURN]. You will see an asterisk prompt.
- Remove the CP/M disc from the drive, and replace it with the floppy disc which contains the program you want to run.
- Type M:=*.*. The disc will whirr for a minute or two and the screen will tell you as it copies files across to M:
- When you see the asterisk prompt again, type [RETURN]. Now you will see the CP/M "A>" prompt again.
- Type M: [RETURN]. This tells CP/M that all your files are now in the RAM disc, and you will see the CP/M prompt change to "M>"
- Now you can remove the program's floppy disc from the drive. You should be able to use the program exactly as if it was running from the A drive. The floppy disc drive is now free for you to use purely as data storage, without being cluttered up with program files.

There are a couple of points to watch out for:

1. The PCW8512 has a large enough RAM drive to store an entire floppy disc from the A: drive, but the 8256 does not. On an 8256, if after you type "M:=*.*" in PIP it transfers some files and then says "ERROR: DISK WRITE NO DATA BLOCK", it means the RAM disc is full.

Your only option then is to try to cut out the non-essential program files from the floppy disc – the program manual should tell you which files are needed to actually run the program and which are, for example, simply for demonstration or installation. To transfer an individual file called FILE.DOC you would type (in response to the asterisk prompt in the PIP utility)
M:=FILE.DOC[RETURN].
If there are several files involved you should refer to the tip below titled 'Automating Commands'!

2. It is important to save any work you do on a real floppy disc, A: or B: rather than M: (otherwise you will lose your files when you switch off). Whenever your program asks you for a file name, prefix your file name by "A:" or "B:", e.g. "A:MYFILE.DAT". Alternatively, many programs allow you to change your default disc drive; make sure your default is A: or B:.

WARNING!
Remember that when you turn the PCW off, all the files stored in M: will pass on to the great floppy disc in the sky.

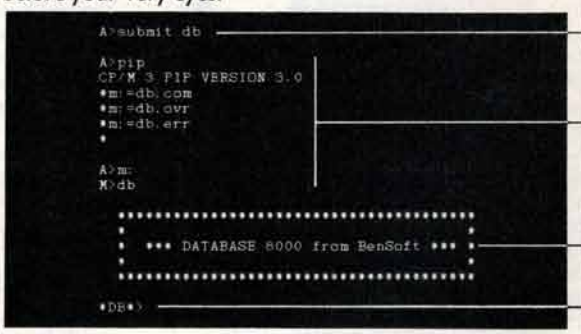
Automating commands

The business of transferring all your program files from floppy disc to M: is well worthwhile, but can be tedious if you have to do it for a lot of individual files. Luckily there is a way in CP/M of doing it automatically using the SUBMIT utility.

Here's an example: suppose you have a database program called "DB", which you like to run from the M: disc. And suppose this database needs three files to run, DB.COM, DB.OVR and DB.ERR. Every time you run the program, you want to copy these files from A: to M: and then run the program. To do this, set up a file called, say, DB.SUB (it can be called anything you like as long as it ends ".SUB") which contains these lines:

```
PIP
<M:=DB.COM
<M:=DB.OVR
<M:=DB.ERR
<
M:
DB
```

(If you don't know how to create a new text file on your disc, see the PCW CP/M manual section 2.4). You will need to have the CP/M files PIP.COM and SUBMIT.COM on the same disc as the database files. Whenever you run your DB database, just type SUBMIT DB [RETURN], and you will see the commands automatically happening before your very eyes.



This all you actually type in – and if you follow the advice in "Making an auto-start disc" you won't even have to do that.

All these commands are being printed on screen and executed automatically from the file DB.SUB

The program DB.COM comes up on screen.

Now you begin using the database normally.

Making an Auto-start disc

The SUBMIT utility has many hidden features which deserve a closer look. One that we'll take up for now though is the ability to have customised discs to start up a program at the beginning of a session without your having to do any typing at all.

When CP/M starts up from scratch, before it gives you its first "A>" prompt it has a look on the floppy disc to see if there is a file called PROFILE.SUB. If there is, then it automatically runs the SUBMIT utility with this file. So considering the example with running DB from a submit file, if we rename DB.SUB as PROFILE.SUB, then all the commands in it will be automatically run when you start CP/M with that disc in.

The only problem comes in how exactly to adapt your program disc so that CP/M can start up from it – this is called "making a boot disc". CP/M is contained in a file on your current boot disc called something like J14CPM3.EMS (the digits might be different depending on what version of CP/M you have), and you have to copy this file to your working disc, by using PIP. This file is quite large, about 40k, so you might have trouble fitting it onto your work disc, particularly with PIP.COM, SUBMIT.COM and all your work files – if you can't cut down the number of work files to fit everything in then you are basically stuck, and you won't be able to make a boot disc very easily.

To sum up then, take your submit file, which we've called DB.SUB so far, and rename it by typing

```
REN PROFILE.SUB DB.SUB
```

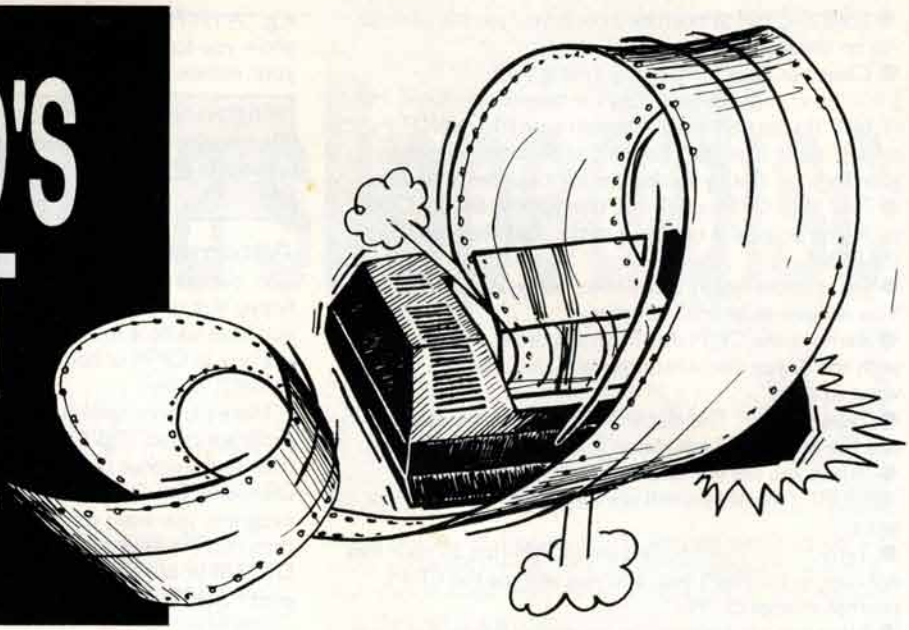
and then make it into a boot disc by copying the .EMS file across from your normal start-up disc; you'll have to use the M: drive as temporary storage:

```
PIP M:=J14CPM3.EMS
(put your work disc in drive A)
PIP A:=M:J14CPM3.EMS
```

Now, if you insert this disc when you first power up the machine, or reset it using [SHIFT]+[EXTRA]+[EXIT], your DB program will start up straight away without you having to type anything.

LANGFORD'S PRINTOUT

A page foolishly handed over to SF author DAVID LANGFORD who just happens to own an AMSTRAD



Perils of LocoManuScripting

Well, it's the old story: like 5,271,009 people in the Home Counties alone, I bought a PCW 8256. My motives were half noble and pure (I'm a professional writer), half hopelessly corrupt: I also prey on unfortunate punters by flogging them software. Your editor thinks my jottings must therefore be deeply interesting to you all. Little does he know.

The other day I was slumming in an IBM PC magazine, where I found the fascinating news that Amstrad PCW machines have met with a "lukewarm response". To translate this you need to know the subtle linguistic codes used by IBM fanatics: If you buy an IBM PC, that's a ringing declaration of total commitment. If you buy something else, it's a lukewarm response.

Back in reality, a mate of mine at Gollancz (the publishers) reports that although the number of truly terrible manuscripts he receives hasn't altered *that* much, there's been a distinct change of appearance. Time was when all too many first novels were handwritten in blue crayon in excercise books. Now, fully 25% of them are LocoScripted in that unmistakable Joyce typeface.

Once upon a time it was a piece of publishing folklore that a beautifully printed submission with multiple type-styles and straight margins at both left and right, exquisitely bound in tooled goatskin with rich puce endpapers... was never any good. But since the coming of cheapo word-processors, a "perfect" typescript isn't evidence of pointless obsession any more. The little twiddly bits are no problem. Retyping a corrected page is a doddle. There are, however, still points to watch.

Don't overdo it. Avoid hordes of different typestyles: if a long passage has to go in italics, it's OK to print it that way (you should also write "italics" in the margin). However using LocoScript italics for odd words is a mistake: the copy-editor will hate you, because he'll need to underline all those words for the typesetters – better you save him the trouble. And avoid justified right-hand margins: traditional editors feel these look subtly naff in submitted typescripts.

Don't forget to use the handy "header" function to number every page. Include your surname and a short form of the book's title too: top right is a good place. No extra work is involved, and you'll have insured against the day when the drunken editor shuffles your masterpiece with other identically LocoScripted (but otherwise, of course, deeply inferior) submissions.

Don't muck around with any gadget, device or process which glues, screws, wires, welds or staples hundreds of MS pages into a single "book". Publishers hate these massive objects: they're awkward to handle and usually get ripped apart for convenience (as will in any case happen at the typesetting stage, unless you have the clout to force them to typeset from your discs). Loose A4 pages in a box are fine; it's permitted to use staples or paperclips at top left to fasten the chapters together.

Don't, after spending all this loot on a word processor, skimp on the paper! If you try to save paper by printing in 17 characters per inch, or ribbon by sticking to "draft" quality, your editor will enclose a hefty bill from his optician with the rejection slip. (High quality with 10 or at most 12 characters per inch, please.) If you don't double-space your MS (with +LS2) it probably won't even be read. Ditto if you're such a miser as to leave only a quarter-inch margin all round the edge: allow lots of space for copyeditors to make their cryptic marginal notes, like "By George, what a work of genius!" And finally, use paper with a certain amount of moral fibre: gossamer-thin, electronically-tested stuff which wilts and slithers all over the editorial desk may not ensure rejection, but can tip the balance when someone is debating whether to finish your MS or go to the pub...

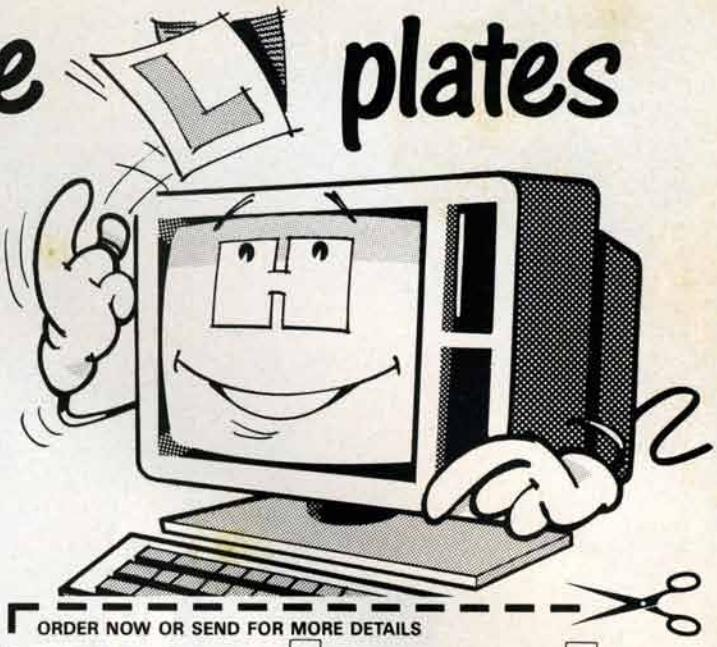
Oddity of the month

Try this LocoScript experiment: hold down the SHIFT key and type "OK". No, *really fast*, so the O key hasn't quite risen before the K goes down. A spurious RETURN magically appears between the two letters. As a fast typist, I wondered for a while whether LocoScript had a built-in style checker and was conditioning me to type the preferred "Okay". However, it happens in CP/M and other programs too: my diagnosis is a bug in the PCW's keyboard scanning. Not quite as bad as the time when I was trying to run a Prestel SF database from a Commodore 64 and couldn't speed-type "SF" – it tended to come out as "SXF"...

DISC GOBBLING

There's a more technical argument against unnecessary RH justification in LocoScript. I found this when furtively peeping into the structure of document files, using the supplied SID.COM. LocoScript uses lots of its own special codes to represent print controls and things in your text file, and some of these are mindbogglingly cumbersome. An ordinary letter like P, C or W occupies a single byte (1024 bytes per K, remember), but pressing the TAB key adds 9 bytes to your document!

Throw away the L plates



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At a recent exhibition we met several unhappy spreadsheet users. They had visited their local Amstrad dealer and requested a copy of ScratchPad Plus. Whereupon they were told that "one spreadsheet is much the same as another" and by coincidence, the one the dealer happened to have in stock would be "just what they required".

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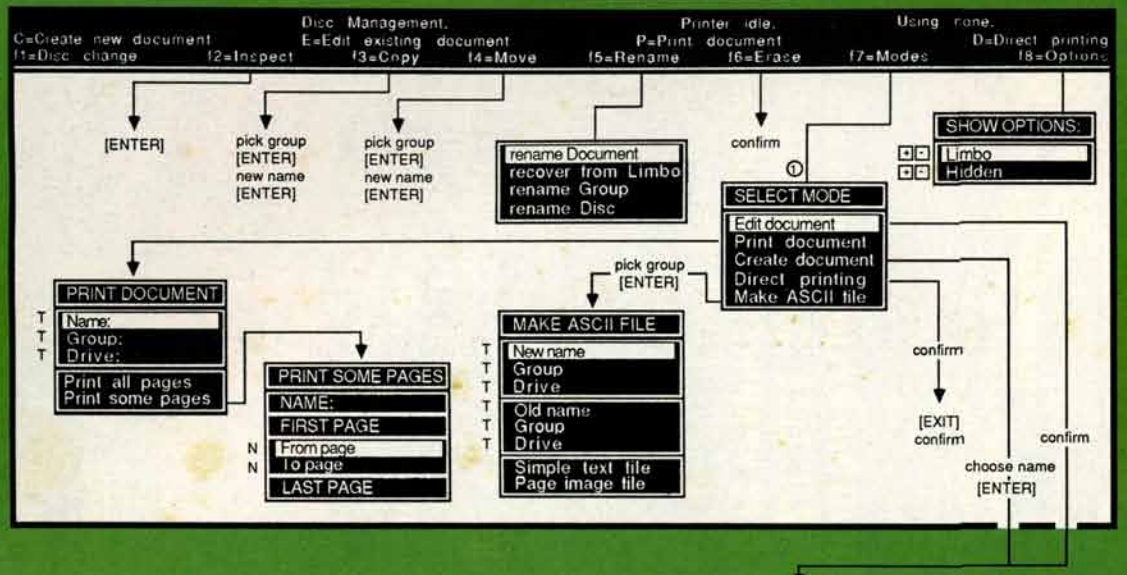
LOCOSCRIPT

THE GUIDE AT YOUR SIDE

DISC MANAGEMENT SCREEN

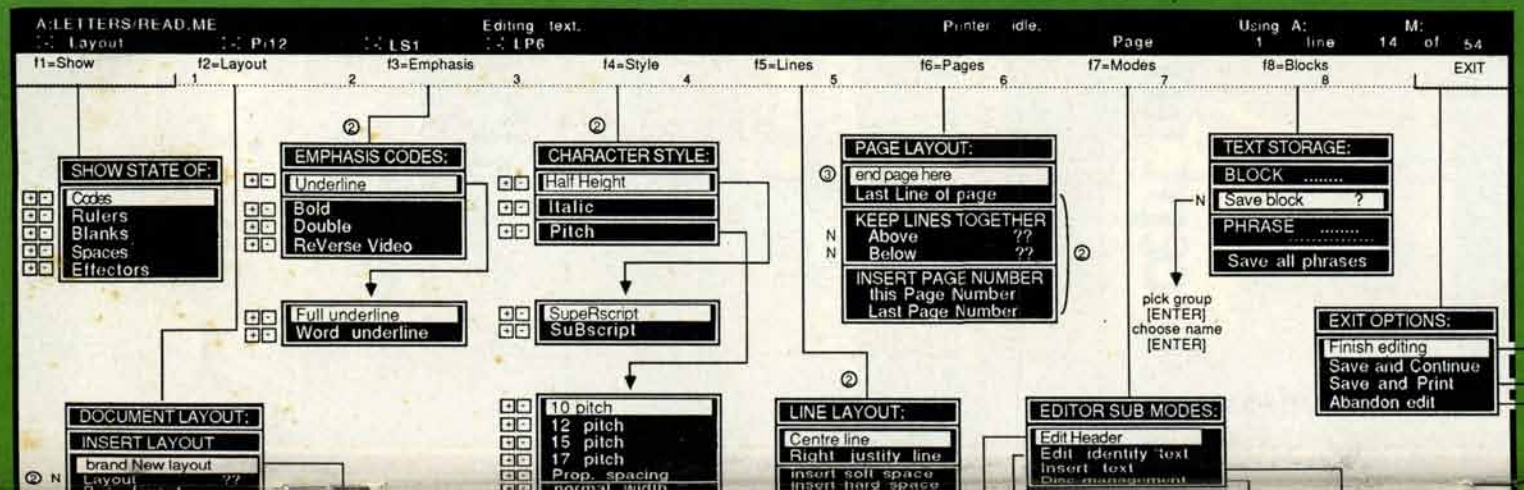


How to use this chart

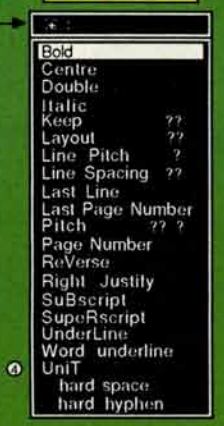
This chart shows all the possible screens and menus that you can see in LocoScript, how to get to each one and where it goes afterwards. To make it easier to read, we've used certain conventions:

- ► Where there's no other legend, the normal way of using a menu is to place the highlight bar over the item you want using the cursor up and down keys, and then press [ENTER] which both actions the choice and clears the menu off.
- ► Menu choices in capitals are headings and cannot be selected – the highlight bar will just skip over them.
- ► If the menu choice has ⊞⊟ by it, then you must press ⊞ to set or ⊟ to clear the choice before pressing [ENTER] to complete.
- ► If the menu choice has N or T by it, then you must type a Number or some Text respectively followed by [ENTER], before pressing [ENTER] again to complete.
- ► Some of the simple menus that merely ask you to confirm an action have been left off – the chart just says "confirm" at these points. Press [ENTER] to proceed or [CAN] to stop.
- ► Where further explanation is needed, we've used a footnote.

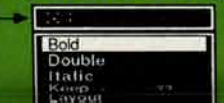
EDITING TEXT SCREEN

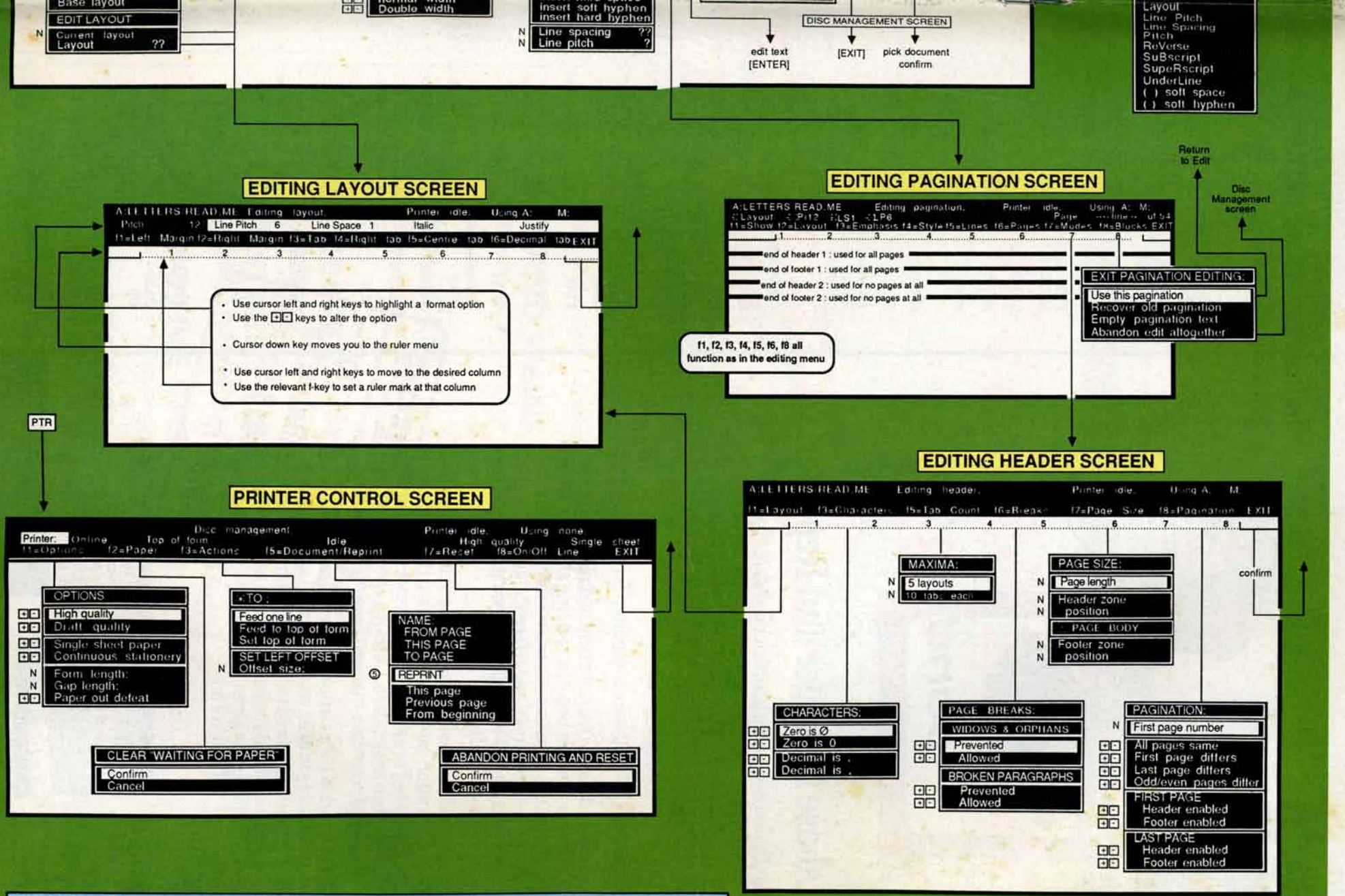


+ SET MENU



- CLEAR MENU

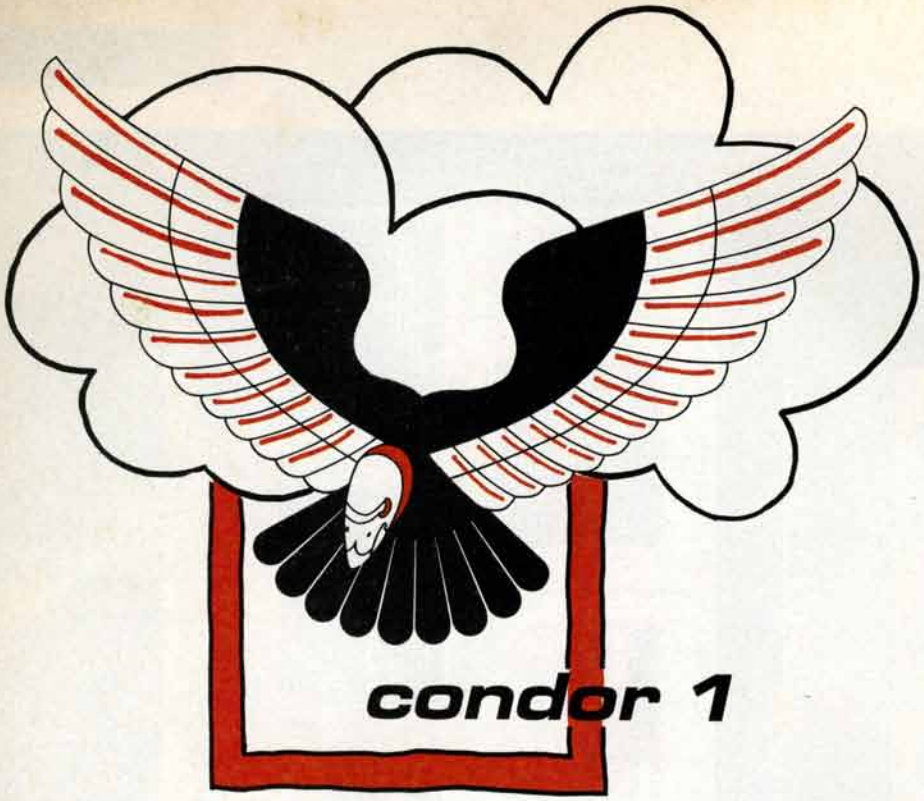




FOOTNOTES

1. The choices in this menu can be directly accessed from the Disc Management screen by their initials E, P, C, D as appropriate.
2. This choice, or all choices in this menu, can also be accessed with the SET (⊞) and CLEAR (⊟) menus - see the LocoScript manual pp 121-123.
3. This choice can be directly typed with the key combination [ALT]+[RETURN].
4. The UNIT choice can only be accessed by the set menu.
5. The REPRINT choice can be highlighted but not selected – you must use one of the choices below it on the menu.

LocoScript is a trademark of Locomotive Software Ltd.



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You know that Caxton only publish superior software products. Cardbox is the world's best-selling simple electronic card index. BrainStorm is the world's first ideas processor. ScratchPad plus is the only enhanced Virtual Memory Spreadsheet available for your Amstrad. And Touch 'n' Go is the UK's most highly respected disk-based typing Tutor.

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Condor 1 enhanced version – available for the Amstrad 1512 series at £99.99 inc VAT.

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Telex: 27950 ref 398

See us at the Amstrad User Show

The Condor 1 Commands – They couldn't be simpler!

Database Creation and Maintenance

DEFINE	Create, redefine or describe a database
DESTROY	Eliminate a database or file
FORMAT	Create or revise a form or HELP screen
REORG	Reorganize the structure of a database; add or delete items

Information Input and Update

APPEND	Attach records of one database to another
EMPTY	Eliminate all data in a database
ENTER	Insert new data into a database
POST	Update entries in one database with those from another
UPDATE	Change entries in a database meeting specified conditions

Information Processing and Report Writing

COMPARE	Compare entries in two databases for (not) matching conditions and create a RESULT database
COMPUTE	Compute entries in a database
LIST	Display database records in sequential order
PRINT	Print database records in sequential order
PRINTER	Printer output control and redirection
SELECT	Select database records meeting specified conditions, creating a RESULT database
SORT	Sort database records by entries
STAX	View or print statistics of entries
TABULATE	Summarize specified entries. Print or save the result
TITLE	Print report headings

Operation Aids

HELP	Assist operator in selecting procedures
INSTALL	Saves SET and PRINTER options
RESTART	Continue processing interrupted commands
RUN	Process and execute a command procedure with options for command modification

Interfaces

READ	Transfer records from an ASCII file to an existing database
WRITE	Transfer records from a database to an ASCII sequential file

Utilities

COPY	Copy a database or file
DATE	View or enter date
DIC	View entries in the data dictionary
DIR	View the list of files in the disk directory
LOGDISK	Log a new disk in the computer
RENAME	Change the name of a database or file
SAVE	Save a RESULT database
SET	Set operating parameters
SYSTEM	Exit from Condor 1 back to operating system
TERM	Defines the computer (not needed on Amstrad)

PC PLUS

A NEW ERA STARTS HERE

FIRST ISSUE FREE WITH 8000 PLUS

22 pages devoted to the Amstrad PC1512

FULL LAUNCH DETAILS 52
The full spec and prices – as revealed on the day!

NEWS AND VIEWS 55
How the industry is preparing for the new era, with news of super-low prices for PC software.

OPEN ACCESS 56
Derived from a powerful suite designed to cater for all your needs, and now at a new low price.

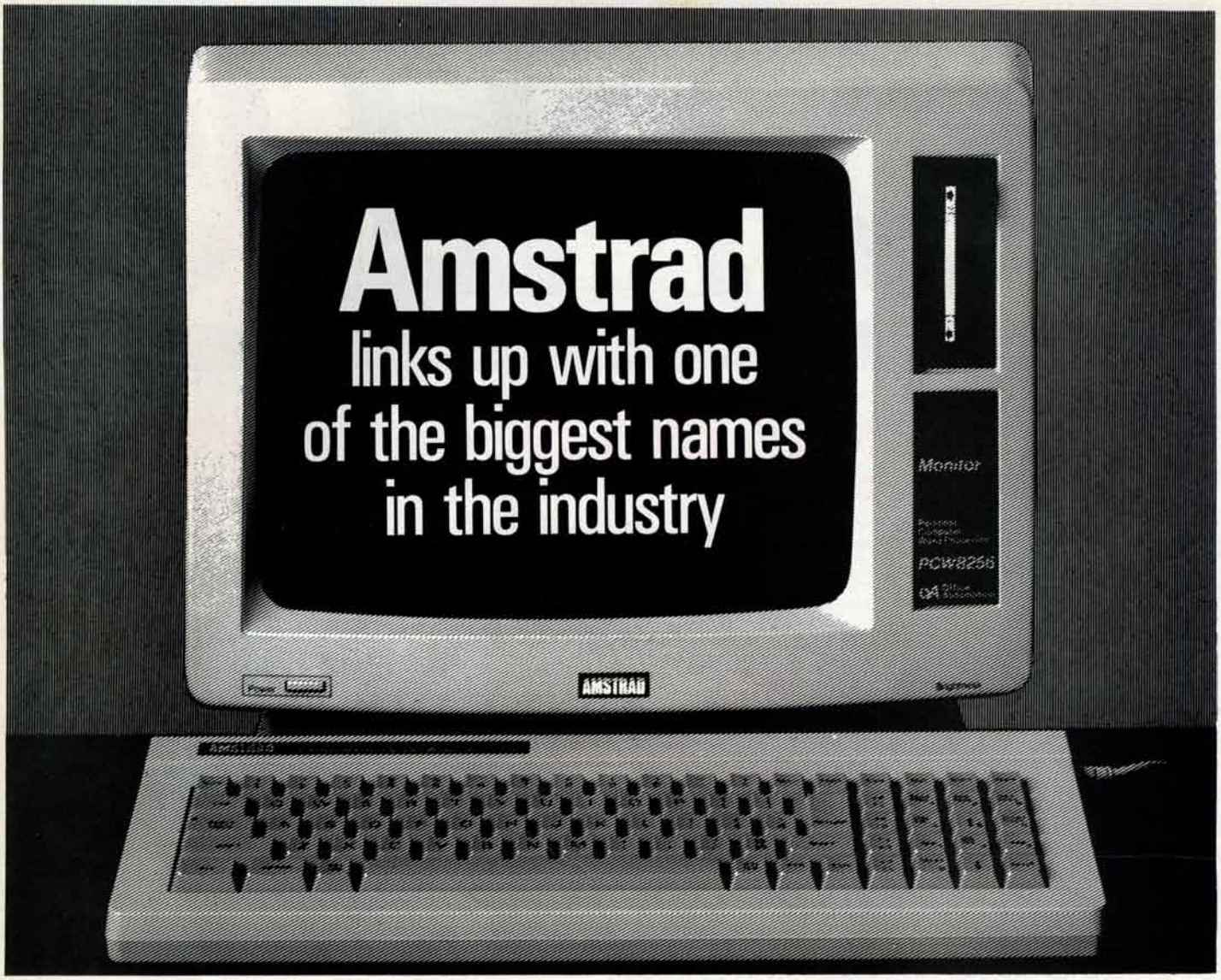
TIME KEEPER 58
Get your priorities right with Caxton's project planner.

FLEET STREET EDITOR 61
Desktop publishing made easy with this budget package from Mirrorsoft.

LOCOMOTIVE BASIC 64
This powerful programming language lets you get the most from your PC.

GEM COLLECTION 65
All you need to know about the mice and wimps that come with your PC.

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE 68
A look at what else you can do with your PC besides work. Games, graphics, music, communication – you name it, the PC can do it.



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A NEW ERA STARTS HERE

The launch of the Amstrad PC-compatible is being seen by much of the computer industry as the start of a new era – an era in which real computing power is available at prices we can afford. But cheap computer hardware and software is only the start. The real problems come when you plug the thing in, turn it on, and wonder what to do next.

Owning an Amstrad PC is a very different thing from using it effectively and efficiently – which is where we come in. *PC PLUS* is not a business magazine or a technical magazine: it is the magazine to help you make the most of your PC, and put you in touch with others in the same position. It caters for readers at all stages: from those who have never seen an A-prompt in their lives to those fluent in Basic and Pascal.

If you run a business we will look at the problems you face running it on a computer. We will carry regular reviews of new programs as they come out, and look at add-ons that might make life easier. We will also look at training and maintenance schemes that you could well use. We know that without help, computerising your business is not a bed of roses and can turn into an expensive nightmare.

These pages are not just for business though; there is a lot more to the Amstrad PC than that. We will look at games, telecommunications, graphics, sound, programming and all the other things that make computers worth having. We will also carry regular features on making the most of MS-DOS, GEM and Basic, which take you beyond the manual and get to grips with what they are all about.

INTERACTION

But most of all we will be looking to you to tell us what you want. If you have a problem with *WordStar* then let us know: if we can't answer your problem then perhaps other readers can. Even if they can't they might benefit from the replies. If you have found a nifty way of doing your accounts, then let us in on the secret: other readers will certainly benefit, and may even find a better solution.

If you are thinking of setting up a local user group, or offer a service that might be useful to others, or just want to show off, be funny, be controversial, or complain about something we said – these pages are for you. So make the most of them.

PC PLUS

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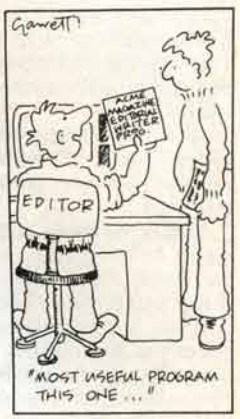


PC COMPATIBILITY

But why is the launch of what to many is just another PC-clone creating so much excitement? To answer that we have to look (briefly!) at the whole history of microcomputing, and in particular at one company – IBM.

International Business Machines, to give its full title, is one of the largest companies in the world, and has dominated the computer market from mechanical cogs through vacuum tubes to mini- and mainframe computers. In 1980 IBM launched its first microcomputer, the IBM PC as it was called.

At the time there were many other competent micros on the market, but the sheer size of the company meant that the new machine quickly became a standard of sorts. Software publishers in particular wanted a standard: it would mean they could sell larger quantities without major re-writes for a range of totally incompatible machines.

This was all to the good as far as IBM was concerned. As more software was written specifically for the PC, so it became a more desirable machine, and the situation spiralled. Other micro manufacturers were faced with a problem: even though their machines might be faster and cheaper they were having a hard time persuading publishers to convert software to run on them. The solution many of them adopted was to produce machines that were compatible with IBM's PC, but were faster or cheaper – and so the 'PC-clone' was born.

THE AMSTRAD PC

Now the micro market is dominated by PC-clones, and a huge library of software has grown up around the IBM standard. But until the advent of the Amstrad PC, clones have been relatively expensive. It is true that there are quite a number of low-cost clones available from the Far East, but these have not had the impact on the software industry that the Amstrad PC is having.

Just look at the *PC PLUS* news pages. They are full of software companies cutting the price of their products drastically for the launch of the Amstrad PC. Sean O'Reilly of SPI said that he saw the launch of the Amstrad PC as 'marking the start of a whole new era in the PC world'. His sentiments are widely shared.

And it's not just in the business market. The price of the Amstrad PC, and its use of *GEM* (see page 65), make it a micro for pleasure as well as for business. Games are already a big market in the States, and games companies have woken up to a growing market here for entertainment on the PC. These are exciting times indeed.

THE PEOPLE'S

Sugar unveils the remarkable low-cost 1512s at the year's biggest launch

After months of increasingly excited rumour, the new range of Amstrad PCs was finally launched on September 2nd at a packed London press conference.

Alan Sugar told the 900 journalists that his new machines would do anything an IBM could and challenged the world to match his prices. In an atmosphere of high-tech razamatazz, he described the new machines as true "personal computers" -- ones which everyone could afford, yet which could be used both as fabulous home computer and powerful business tool.

"Now father really can bring his work home – and sonny Jim can play Space Invaders," he quipped, seriously understating his machine's potential for entertainment and leisure.

Amstrad's publicity echoes the theme. The PC 1512 is "compatible with you know who, priced as only we know how."

Most of the details of the new range, including the name PC1512, had leaked before the launch. But Sugar's confirmation of their facilities, and the astonishingly low prices has sent massive shock waves through the established computer market. There's little doubt that this was "the launch of the year".

Basically there are EIGHT machines -- four different models each available in colour and mono. The bottom of the range is a single-disc machine with mono screen which sells for just £399 plus VAT – little more than people were paying for the vastly less powerful BBC machine four years ago.

Other models offer dual floppy drives, or 10 or 20Mbyte hard discs. Again the prices on the latter are astonishing – the hard disc models start at £699! And the top of the range is a colour PC with 20Mbyte hard disc for just £949 plus VAT.

All the machines come bundled with a mouse and the "friendly" operating system GEM – the only IBM-compatible to do this.

Other special features include a built-in quartz clock with battery back up. This means the machine will be superb for such things as desk diaries, and any application which needs to keep a track of time and date.

The colour versions offer 16 different colours – on the mono machines these will show as 16 shades of grey. The mono screen is notable for its standard display of black text on a white background – it looks smart and different.

One key area which was only partially touched on at the launch is that of compatibility with the IBM itself. Although it appears most major applications will run fine on the Amstrad without modification, Sugar admitted that some packages "from minor software houses" might not run.

GEM OF A LAUNCH

The launch of the Amstrad PC was accompanied by major news from Digital Research, authors of the machine's GEM and DOS-Plus operating systems. In a move that has turned traditional IBM PC marketing strategy on its head and underlined the importance of the Amstrad PC, they're launching no less than NINE programs to support the new machine.

Four of these are totally new packages in versions specifically aimed at the Amstrad – owners of the official IBM PC will have to wait for their versions.

The four new packages are GEM Diary, GEM Draw Business Library, GEM Fonts & Drivers Pack (all at £39.95), and GEM Font Editor (at £99.95). Making up the 9 package range is the full catalogue of existing GEM software, including GEM Write, GEM Draw, GEM Graph, GEM WordChart and GEM Programmers Toolkit.

GEM Diary is a desktop utility which can be called up from anywhere in GEM, whether running a program or not, to set alarm calls, flick through an address book, or make notes on a scratchpad. GEM Draw Business library provides useful base patterns for inclusion in DR Draw documents by business users, while the remaining two new offerings allow the Amstrad PC to directly drive a wide range of peripherals, including laser writers such as the Apple LaserWriter.

Paul Bailey, senior vice-president of DR, is very enthusiastic about both the Amstrad PC and the range of GEM products. "Amstrad has tailored the PC1512 for GEM, packing a lot of horsepower into the machine to get the best out of GEM. Supplying a mouse as standard is, we believe, unique amongst PC compatibles.

• PR gloss. AS gloats over the £399 bottom of the range 1512 SD.

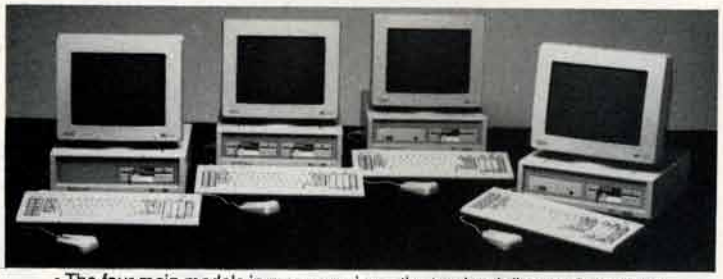
Links with the Amstrad PCW

One exciting result of the confirmation that the Amstrad PC will run the DOS Plus operating system is that existing owners of Amstrad's PCW machines will be able to transfer their data discs when they upgrade.

This is because DOS Plus can read data files created under CP/M. So if you own a PCW and run a standard database or accounts package, when you buy the same package for the PC you can in principle take all the data that you typed in over the last year with you. However the PC will not be able to read PCW discs directly.

A clear indication of Amstrad's future marketing policy for PCWs was given wehen Sugar told the press conference: "The PCW is a dedicated word-processor, a replacement for the type-writer."

PC!



• The four main models in mono version – the two hard disc versions (right) also include one floppy disc

THE FULL SPECIFICATION

HARDWARE CONFIGURATION:
Monitor, detached keyboard, mouse, plus main unit incorporating drives.
DISC DRIVES
Options of one or two 5.25" 360K standard IBM floppy disc drives, 10 or 20 MByte hard disc.
MAIN PROCESSOR
8086 running at 8 MHz.
MEMORY
512K RAM expandable to 640K – part can be assigned as RAM disc.
SCREEN DETAILS
Resolution 640 x 200 pixels. Colour or mono options. Mono screen: text black on paper white background.
EXPANDABILITY
Centronics and serial ports, two joystick ports. Three vacant slots for expansion cards.
HARDWARE SPECIAL FEATURES
Battery backup clock, non-volatile area of RAM.
OPERATING SYSTEMS
MS-DOS version 3.2, DOS-Plus, GEM.
OTHER BUNDLED SOFTWARE
Locomotive Basic 2, GEM-Paint, GEM-Desktop
MODEL RANGE
Four separate versions each available in colour or mono.

1. PC1512 SD (single floppy disc drives)	£399	£549
2. PC1512 DD (double floppy disc drives)	£499	£649
3. PC1512 HD10 (10 Mbyte hard disc)	£699	£849
4. PC1512 HD20 (20 Mbyte hard disc)	£799	£949

The DMP 3000

At the same time as the PC 1512 launch, Amstrad have announced a new printer, the DMP 3000. It's an Epson-compatible dot-matrix printer with a claimed speed of 105 characters per second. It's fully compatible with the IBM character set and will sell for just £179.00 plus VAT.

Since the 1512 is not bundled with a printer, Amstrad clearly see the DMP 3000 as the ideal companion.

Software launches

There's already a long list of software targetted specially for owners of the new PC.

Amstrad themselves have announced they're marketing three major products at the remarkably low price of £69.95. The packages are *SuperCalc3, WordStar 1512* and *Reflex*, a database.

They're also putting out *Sidekick* at £29.95.

Interestingly Amstrad have also lined up a range of entertainment software for the new machine, clearly recognising its potential to be a hit in homes this Christmas.

The six titles are: *Cyrus 2 Chess, Summer Games 2, Winter Games, Alex Higgins Snooker, Mean 18 Golf* and *PitStop 2.*

Launch glamour

In typical Amstrad style, the big launch included some expensive special effects. A huge electronic screen, coupled with a pair of giant red lips, splurged out the spec of the new range in a sketch which was a cross between Max Headroom and the Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy.

When asked to compute price of the new Amstrad machine, the screen suggested that £1700 seemed about right. But then proclaimed: "Only one person in the galaxy knows the true price."

The cue for Alan Sugar's entry.

SUGAR'S INCREDIBLE EXPANSION

1983 1986

Alan Sugar's success over the last couple of years has been well-documented. But the latest launch should outdo even his own track record. And he knows it. Here's what he had to say to journalists at the big launch.

On their position in the market: *"It would be very difficult for anyone in the world to compete with these prices."*
On the machine's prospects: *"Amstrad are capitalising on an already established market place."*
On its software prospects: *"Software vendors are waking up to the fact that some of their software costs more than the machine itself. Prices will fall."*
On its expandability: *"Anything that can fit into an IBM can plug into this."*
On the fact that EIGHT machines were launched:*"Well, we're hedging our bets really."*
On what effect the launch would have on the price of PCWs:*"We might put them up."*
On the machines' IBM compatibility:*"There might be a little known package from an equally little known company that it won't run. That's their problem really."*

OTHER NEWS

NEWSTAR WORKALIKES

A new word has been introduced to the world of computing by NewStar Software Limited – the word is *workalike.*

It is used to describe software clones: new packages that are similar to and compatible with existing industry standards such as *WordStar, Lotus 1-2-3* and *dBase III.* The idea is that workalikes are cheaper and better too.

NewWord2, at £69, is a workalike of the £395 package *Wordstar3 Professional*; and top of the *NewWord* range is now the £249 *NewWord3.* This is not a workalike, but is extensively enhanced and compatible with the rest of the *NewWord* range – as the price suggests.

On the *Lotus 1-2-3* front, NewStar is offering *VP Planner* at £99. Written by Paperback Software in the States, this is described as 'a Lotus clone with a multi-dimensional database'.

Attacking the powerful but pricey *dBase III* comes *VP-Info*, again at £99. This workalike has a built-in compiler, so programs written using the in-built programming language can be run at high speed. Like *dBase III* it runs in a network – allowing many users to use the program at the same time – but this is standard and not an optional extra with its own pricetag.

AMSTRAD COMPUTER SHOW

If you have attended the *Personal Computer World Show* you may have had enough of shows for a while, but it might be worth marking the *Amstrad Computer Show* in your diary. This takes place at the Novotel in Hammersmith, London between the 3rd and 5th October, and is of course full of products for all models of Amstrad computers. Already it looks to be dominated by the PC, so it could well be worth your while attending. Phone 061-456 8835 for further details.

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Small Business Support Group

Want to learn how to make friends with your computer and influence people? Then maybe you need the *Small Business Support Group*. For an annual subscription of £40 (including VAT) *SBSG* aims to provide you with the answers to all your problems.

What you get for your money includes a wide range of services. First of all there is the telephone Helpline service – office hours only – which will try to answer your problem on the spot, or ring you back later with the solution. Next comes the bi-monthly newsletter, starting with the October/November issue which promises regular training features on popular software packages, plus members' letters and tips together with news and reviews.

The company also runs training courses on popular packages from its rather charming headquarters in the Cotswold town of Broadwater. These usually last a day at a price of £100 per person per day, but are discounted by 10 per cent to members of the *SBSG*. Trainees will be able to learn on Amstrad PCs or a selection of other PC-compatibles.

Your £40 also brings you free membership to the *ONE to ONE* electronic mail system – normally worth £50 and very useful if you happen to own a modem as well as a PC. You will still have to pay normal running costs, but will be able to send both telexes and electronic messages world wide, as well as contacting *SBSG* on its own mailbox.

And finally *SBSG* offers a large library of 'public domain software' to its members, as well as a disc copying service for transfering data from one disc format to another. You are not allowed to copy professional packages of course but can, for example, transfer data from the 3-inch format Amstrad CPC machine to your PC for a cost of £5 per disc, which includes the disc itself.

The *Small Business Support Group* can be contacted on (0386) 841229, or you can join at any large W.H.Smith Computer shop.

FOX'S CORNER

Barry Fox has written for publications too numerous to mention, using pencils, pens and typewriters with ease. At last he has dragged himself into the 20th Century only to find that a computer doesn't solve all your problems...

When you buy a typewriter it doesn't come as a box of keys, levers, and springs with an engineers' manual on how to put them together. When you buy a xerox copier or office coffee machine there is no need to find a user group of xerobuffs or bean enthusiasts who will explain how to get them up and running. So why should it be different with a computer?

This crazy industry has had it too good for too long. It has grown fat on false promises and sale by guilt. Buy your kids a computer or see them starve on the dole; learn programming to protect your income when the steelworks shuts down; use one in the kitchen to store recipes, in the hall to store phone numbers and in the cellar to control the central heating. Rubbish. Just ask anyone who has actually tried to load a database program just to check Auntie's address. And has anyone ever actually tried to run a gas boiler from a home micro? If so I'd like to hear about it.

And as if that wasn't enough we are faced with a plethora of makes and models, all totally incompatible with each other. I've lost count of all the different Atari, Tandy, Sinclair and Commodore systems that have come and gone. Their manuals made no sense unless the user already understood what the manual was trying to say. A succession of updates made supposedly the same machines incompatible with each other, and their manuals. Only Apple's Macintosh made sense – a machine that needs no manual because the screen says it all. I thought it was bad enough with video recorders – but this is ridiculous. When the IBM PC looked like setting a standard, I thought things might settle down.

But the IBM format (or, more accurately, range of formats) didn't become a standard because it was particularly good. It prevailed because everyone wanted a standard and the giant IBM had one to offer. MS-DOS is an appalling obstacle course. The adventurer must struggle to learn its mysteries while the consultants get rich from teaching busy executives how to cope.

The launch of the Amstrad PC might just change the rules. It is cheaper than most clones, and comes with GEM software to give Mac-like instructions on screen. Now small businesses really might be able to buy a PC and start using it as a business tool. And about time too.

BUSINESS AND PLEASURE

Ariolasoft are attacking the PC software market on all fronts, with three business packages and three games at very competitive prices.

First on the business side comes *HomePak*, which combines word processor, database and communications in one package for £34.95. Next is *New Consultant* at £59.95, which allows files of a size only limited by disc space, and claims to sort 1,000 records in just four seconds. And lastly comes *Cut and Paste*, a low-cost word processor at just £24.95 that offers all the basic features you need.

But, I hear you ask, what about the games? Well, *Seven Cities of Gold* is a 'historically accurate' 16th century arcade/adventure set in the time of the Spanish Conquistadors, that involves exploration and trading with the natives – though you can kill them all off if you feel so inclined. It features over 2800 seperate screens and around 200 native settlements, so there is plenty of scope for wholesale exploitation.

Pinball Construction Set is quite an old game, but still unique in its way. The idea is to construct your own pinball machine and then play it – you have to see it to know what I mean. It is icon-driven with over 24 parts, and you can even play around with the laws of physics if you want to make life really difficult for yourself.

On a slightly more serious level is *Music Construction Set*, an icon-driven package for composing and playing that can generate 13 different qualities of sound. How good they are will depend on the quality of the Amstrad PC's sound though.

All three games are selling at a price of £19.95.

SOFT SHOP Press Release

If you happen to live in London you can take advantage of *Softshop*, to be found inside the Ryman store on Tottenham Court Road. *Softshop* has already specialised in low-cost business software for Amstrad's PCW range, and has now geared itself up for the Amstrad PC.

'We are able to offer...unrivalled price and performance on many excellent products both current and new by preparing ourselves well in advance for the new Amstrad product announcement' says the Managing Director Mark Horne. 'Amstrad has simply been the catalyst in a rapidly changing marketplace.

Amongst the many competitively priced products we will be offering will be a range of basic easy-to-use packages and tutorial software to meet with the anticipated "first time user" requirements'. Amongst other packages and peripherals will be a new integrated package based on the *Lotus 1-2-3* graphic spreadsheet, but priced below £100. *Lotus 1-2-3* is the best selling PC software package of all time, and has become a standard in its own right.

DATA WITH EASE

The one thing missing from the GEM range is a decent database – Peter Jackson investigates SPI's attempt to fill the gap

GEM INFORMATION MANAGER

£99.95 ● Software Products International

At the recent boycott-ridden Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, you could be forgiven for failing to notice which software was used as the standard business management tool. The package in question was *Open Access 2* from Software Products International and, leaving aside the unfortunate fact that all the competitors' records could be stored on the back of an envelope, it was quite a coup for the company.

Now SPI is hoping for another coup, with a full-featured database manager designed specifically for use with Digital Research's GEM environment, and set to coincide with the launch of the Amstrad PC.

In fact, the launch of the package – called *GEM IM*, or *Information Manager*, or *G-Base*, depending on which section of the pre-release manual you read – could have been even more spectacular. Digital Research itself was planning to include the product as the database module in its GEM Collection, but dropped it at a late stage; and Amstrad also looked at the package with a view to marketing it, but decided against because it could not be run on a machine with just one floppy drive.

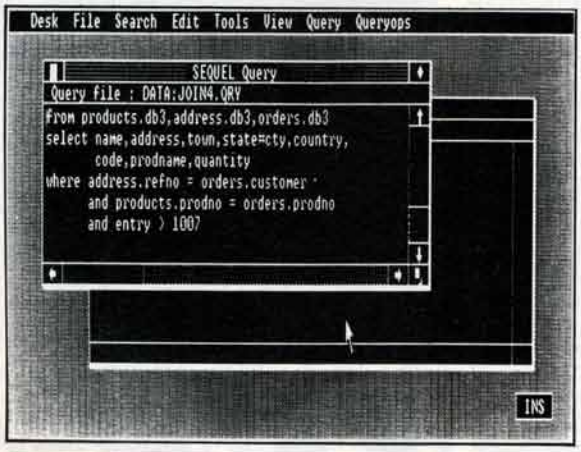
So SPI is finally releasing *IM* under its own name, with two distributors in the shape of Centresoft and NewStar to cover all the chain-store and computer dealer bases.

A QUESTION OF TITLE

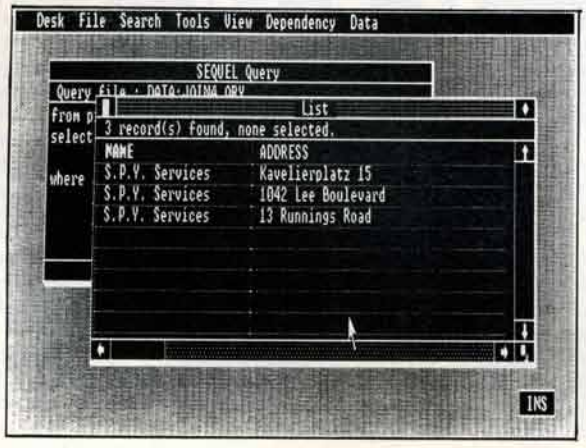
At the time of writing the title of this product had not been finalised. Though based on the database side of *Open Access* we understand that GEM *Information Manager* is the title it is most likely to be sold under, and we will be looking at the GEM implementation of *Open Access* in a later issue. Sorry about any confusion we might have caused...

USING *SEQUEL*

A complex query has been entered, linking three seperate data files together, to display a list of the companies satisfying the criteria laid out in the *Where* statement...



...A window opens, listing the three companies who fulfil the criteria, with the details required.



WHAT IT IS

GEM IM is what, in these relaxed times, we are calling a relational database. What this means in the micro world is that a number of small databases – a list of customer names and addresses, say, alongside a list of orders from those customers, alongside a list of the products on the those orders – can be set up separately and linked as though there were one enormous database with all that information in it.

IM's relational functions, and the structured query language included with it, are features not often seen on microcomputer databases; and certainly not seen on databases costing less than £100. On those grounds alone *IM* is worth investigating.

SPI supplies *IM* on two discs, but assumes that you already own the GEM *Desktop* package. Since GEM is bundled with the Amstrad PC, that is a reasonably safe assumption.

Inserting the installation/example disc with the GEM *Desktop* running, and double-clicking the mouse button on the INSTALL.APP icon, automatically installs the *IM* program in the GEM.APPS folder, and creates another folder called IM.DATA for the examples. Prompt boxes are included to make sure that the right disc is inserted at the right time, but beware; putting the wrong disc in at the wrong time bombs the machine and means you have to turn off and start again. Double-clicking on the IM.APP icon starts up the program, and two windows appear on the desktop beneath the first of *IM*'s custom menu bars.

The top window is titled SEQUEL Query, since SPI assumes that most people will want to retrieve information from a database immediately. *SEQUEL* is *IM*'s structured query language and, as with all query languages, the aim is to let users retrieve information from data files as simply and as naturally as possible by using English-like sentences.

The second window is the display window, where retrieved data is displayed under the command of the *SEQUEL* instructions.

Before going any further, it is worth laying out how the queries and data files fit together inside the *IM* program. The fundamental elements are the data files themselves, which are stored with the file extension .DB3 (could this have something to do with the standard dBase III file format?). Data is entered into these files using *screen masks*, which are user-defined forms displayed on the screen with neat boxes for data entry. These masks are stored with the file extension .SMK, and the separation of the masks from the data files means that the same mask can be used with different files if required. The *SEQUEL* queries, generated by entering statements in the query language, can also be stored as files with extension .QRY, so that common queries can be used over and over again without entering new *SEQUEL* programs. And finally, data selected from the files using a query program can be output as a printed report, using an output mask that can be saved with file extension .PMK. In this way, labels, delivery notes or invoices can be designed and stored for use with data from the files.

SETTING UP A DATABASE

It quickly becomes obvious that *IM* has been designed from the start to work under GEM. Checking the contents of the pull-down menus shows that almost every conceivable function can be carried out using the mouse

with minimum use of the keyboard, although common functions like 'store' can be performed using one of the PC's ten function keys.

Selecting the create command from the Tools menu calls up a box inviting the user to enter a file name – the .DB3 is automatically added – and then produces a blank window that is used to design the input screen mask. Producing the design is as simple as typing the name of the desired data field, and then dragging the mouse pointer to produce a box to contain the eventual input.

The mask design is completely flexible, and repeated re-sizing and re-positioning of boxes can be done until the perfect result is obtained.

Entering data, the most boring but most necessary part of any database, can then be done. As far as *IM* is concerned, the input screen mask is illusory since it stores all data in a tabular format reminiscent of a spreadsheet. But for the user's benefit, data entry and display can use the mask to make it clearer what is going on, particularly when each data file record can be made up from up to eight pages of input mask.

Then, once there is some data to work with, *SEQUEL* comes into its own. See the panel piece for more details of the power of this query language.

RELATIONAL DATABASE POWER

Using multiple small data files rather than one big one has obvious advantages; it cuts down on the disc space required, and makes storing, searching and indexing of data much faster. However, the drawback with microcomputer databases is normally that only one file can be opened at once.

IM removes that restriction completely. Even while the results of a query from one file are still on the screen, the Browse function on one of the menus allows the user to read the contents of any other data file on the system, and even edit it if required, without leaving the current file. And fields in separate files can be linked using *SEQUEL* to create phantom data files, or virtual files, that contain data drawn from those separate files.

All that is needed is to include the names of all the files that are to be linked – up to five of them – in the FROM statement, identify the fields from all those files that you want to include in your virtual database in the SELECT statement, and then include one or more *join conditions* in the WHERE statement. The join conditions set fields in different files equal to each other, and tell *IM* to produce a virtual file containing all possible combinations of those entries from the files specified. Then the other search and select criteria in the query are used to cut this down as desired, to produce the desired combination of data from the various files.

That might sound complex but, believe me, when it is compared with other relational database retrieval systems it is intuitive and easy. And, as with all reviews and manuals, doing it is easier than reading about it.

IM is a deep program, with neat touches abounding everywhere. At every stage where a field name or file name has to be selected, *IM* produces a dialog box showing the possible selections and letting you select them with the mouse. Data can be transferred to and from *IM* from other packages which use the DIF format, with other formats possible with an extra conversion program (not available for testing at the time of this review).

Similarly, a multiple language add-on will be available – not surprising since the company's original multi-function product, *Open Access*, came out in German before it emerged in English. Naturally date and currency formats can be set to all the international standards, and there is a wide range of options in screen mask text display. Input can be controlled to make sure that date and number fields, for example, only have dates and numbers in them.

There were few visible drawbacks that could be found in the limited time at our disposal, although there was a feeling that *IM* was a little sluggish and could slow down with large amounts of data. This could not be tested, and in any case the multi-file relation structure can be used to stop files getting too big.

A pre-release manual was the only documentation available, but – reading between the typesetting marks – it looks thorough, UK produced, and full of examples. As we have said, it is often easier with GEM packages just to sit down and use your intuitition – functions look much more daunting in text than they do on the screen.

CONCLUSIONS

GEM IM is more than a cut-down version of SPI's 'grown-up' PC product, the integrated *Open Access 2* package. It has been written from scratch to use menus and the mouse almost exclusively, even when it comes to entering complex database queries. The features it provides are unusual in databases aimed at the sub-£100 market, and, for once, a GEM package looks finished without any obvious things hanging out the back of it.

The competition in GEM databases is slim, with two main ones on the Atari ST – Stoneware's *DB Master* and Laser Software's *Laserbase* – that have been out for some time without moving across to the PC. When it comes to power and full use of GEM, *IM* does not seem to have any competition in the low-cost PC market.

USING SEQUEL

It is only after data has been entered into a database that the real power of GEM *Information Manager* becomes apparent. The *SEQUEL* language built into the package gives a truly flexible way of extracting information from the mass of largely-irrelevant data that always seems to clog up database files.

The easiest way of using the language is to use its FROM command – selected from the Query menu – to select a data file, and then scroll through the file contents. The contents are displayed in their internal tabular format, with records as rows and fields as columns, but double-clicking on any record brings up its information in screen-mask format.

However, there is a lot more to *SEQUEL* than that. The general structure of a query, with *SEQUEL* commands in capitals, is FROM data file SELECT the fields WHERE these conditions apply, work out the STATUS and display them in this ORDER. Apart from the FROM, which is necessary to tell *SEQUEL* which file it is working with, all these commands are optional.

For example, in a name, address and phone number file the query entered in the query window, written purely by selecting options from pull-down menus and dialog boxes, could be FROM ADDRESS.DB3 SELECT NAME, PHONE WHERE COUNTRY = "ENGLAND" AND NAME LIKE "SMITH" ORDER -NAME. This query would result in a neat table of names and telephone numbers for people called Smith, Smyth or Smythe who live in England, with their names – thanks to that minus sign after the ORDER command – displayed in reverse alphabetical order.

An entire set of *SEQUEL* commands, and operators like +, -, =, LIKE, <, >, OR, AND, NOT and many others are provided to help users build complex queries if desired. Brackets can be used, just as they are in maths or programming, to sort out the order that the *SEQUEL* functions are carried out.

There is no space here to lay out everything *SEQUEL* can do, since that includes multiple SELECT and WHERE commands and even recursive queries where queries call queries. But *SEQUEL* is also the vehicle for *IM*'s relational functions.

PLUSES	MINUSES
⊟A little slow when handling large files.	⊞A real GEM database. ⊞A fully relational database. ⊞Very powerful query language. ⊞Very good value.

RANGE OF FEATURES ■■■■ OVERALL SPEED ■■■□
EASE OF USE ■■■■ DOCUMENTATION ■■■■

PC PLUS VALUE VERDICT ■■■■■

TIMEKEEPER

£49.99 ● Caxton Software Limited

Could you use an electronic diary? Max Phillips finds out

Most people find the idea of keeping their diaries on a PC rather unlikely. After all, even if you happen to be sitting at your keyboard when you need to make an appointment, it's pretty unlikely that you will be running a diary program at the time. So when Caxton bills its *TimeKeeper* package as 'the appointment scheduler', you need to think quite what it does and why you might need it.

TimeKeeper cannot really hope to replace a personal diary, but it does automate the complex charts and diaries used by doctor's surgeries, consultants, visiting inspectors and so on. Like word-processors and databases, *TimeKeeper*'s advantage over manual systems is simply the flexible way that computers can manipulate information. Unlike a paper system, appointments can be rescheduled with a few keystrokes and regular events can be duplicated so that they appear automatically in the future.

TimeKeeper can automatically remind you when a particular event is due, either at the time or well in advance as you desire. This feature, with the strange name of 'tickling', means that *TimeKeeper* will keep your timing up-to-scratch provided you run the program every morning. The program can also find a free spot for a new event by searching your calendar for you. This has obvious application in say, a surgery, where a patient phones to ask for an appointment – though it cannot cope with complex requests, such as 'Monday lunchtime, or Tuesday before 11 or after 6'.

TimeKeeper works by recording the details of a number of calendars. The user sets up each calendar to suit a particular aspect of his or her work; there might be a personal calendar and a business one or a different calendar for each sales representative of a company. Although the program deals best with appointments, the user can allocate any name he likes to each of five items recorded about each appointment. So a freelance illustrator might record the different jobs he had to do, who he was doing them for, the fees and the deadlines – it's possible to use *TimeKeeper* for a wide variety of applications.

The screen looks like a cross between a diary and a calendar. At the top is a graphic representation of either the month, a whole day or part of a day. In the case of the latter displays, *TimeKeeper* draws horizontal bars to show how long each 'event' lasts. Underneath is a list of events for a particular day. The function and cursor keys are used to move freely through the calendar as you require.

Although it will run on a single-drive machine, a twin-drive system is better to provide a sensible amount of storage space. One definite advantage is that the program is not protected against making a back-up copy.

Using *TimeKeeper* is straightforward once you have got used to it. The program relies on many unusual key sequences; and although there is a quick-reference card supplied, there is no accompanying keyboard template – but the keys become familiar after using the program. On the plus side, *TimeKeeper*'s error messages are very clear and the program often suggests a possible list of actions to take.

The program is unusual in that it arrives with a training course on a standard audio cassette, accompanied by a demonstration disc. While this sounds a good idea, the cassette is still in its American form (the program is American in origin) and painful to say the least! Fortunately most of the manual is given over to the tutorial as well, and it should be possible for enthusiastic users to teach themselves. Reference material is adequate, but unfortunately there is no index.

BUT DO YOU NEED IT?

Overall *TimeKeeper* does its job competently. But it's definitely something of a specialist package: unless you can already think how it would be useful to you, you probably won't need it. It shouldn't be confused with programs designed for project management – scheduling and organising all the different parts of a complex project like constructing a building or developing a new product. *TimeKeeper* hasn't the facilities to do this and isn't designed to.

Those who think they might need it should realise that, although it is far neater and more efficient than a manual system, it effectively ties up your computer if you constantly need to use it. This could be avoided with 'program-switching' software though, which would let you run some other program, and switch instantly to *TimeKeeper* whenever you needed it. Also, *TimeKeeper* is strictly for one person to use at one time. Many of the places where it is useful will prefer a manual system because several people can use that at once.

RAM-DISCS

TimeKeeper has the added bonus that, on a single- drive Amstrad PC, some of the memory can be set aside as a *Ram-disc* into which the program can be loaded before use. The disc drive can then be used to hold a calendar disc, thus avoiding the need for two drives.

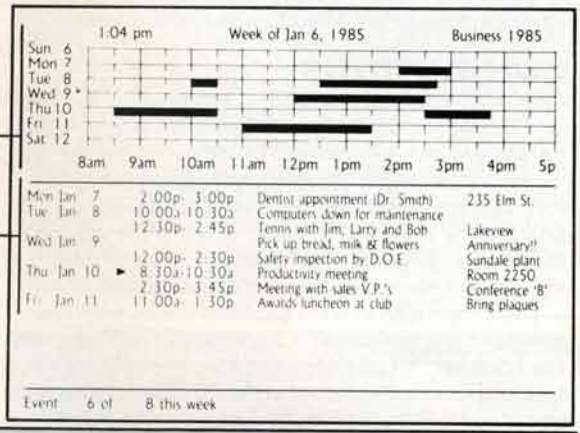
A Ram-disc is created by a little program that effectively partitions off a section of the computer's memory and tells the computer 'this area is the Ram-disc, and you should treat it asthough it is another disc drive'. It has the advantage of being very fast, and *Timekeeper* noticeably speeds up when the program is run from the Ram-disc. However it is not a real disc drive, and you must remember that anything stored there will be lost when you turn your PC off.

In a later issue we will tell you how to create your own Ram-disc, and make best use of it with any application program.

GRAPHIC DISPLAY

A busy week in the life of the average executive in all its graphic glory

A more conventional and detailed listing – hope he remembered the bread, milk and flowers!



PLUSES

- **Useful if timekeeping is a major problem in your life.**
- **Offers all the basic features you need.**
- **Excellent manual.**

MINUSES

- **Lacks extras that would widen its appeal.**
- **Manual lacks an index(!)**
- **Difficult to use at first.**
- **Pen and paper might be more effective for you.**

RANGE OF FEATURES ■■■■□ **OVERALL SPEED** ■■■□□
EASE OF USE ■■□□□ **DOCUMENTATION** ■■■■□

***PC PLUS* VALUE VERDICT** ■■■□□

FLEET STREET

CITY OF LONDON EC4

Editor

PERSONAL PUBLISHING

for your

AMSTRAD PC

For the novice user, the Fleet Street Editor range introduces the concept of desk top publishing an easy-to-use package which allows you to blend graphics and text to produce finished pages.

It is ideal for the production of:

School, club and society newsletters and bulletins
Marketing reports, proposals, and inter-company newsletters
Estate agent particulars
Hotel and restaurants menus, notices and circulars
Personnel and training reports and technical documentation
Retail and mail order catalogues and lists

Fleet Street Editor gives you:

- Direct text entry or import ASCII files
- Full copy, cut and paste, insert and delete facilities
- Left, right or centre justification
- Automatic wordwrap and picturewrap
- One, two, three or four column layout
- Variable column widths
- Ten different font families
- Point sizes in the range of 10 to 48
- Bold, medium or italic styles
- A range of graphic tools for creating illustrations
- Click Art library supplied
- Snapshot facility allows importing of graphics from other programs

Recommended retail price £149.95 including VAT

Hardware requirements:

512K on-board RAM
DOS 2, 0 or higher
Two floppy drives or one hard disk and one floppy drive
IBM/compatible colour card or Hercules/ compatible graphics card
Dot matrix printer supporting IBM graphics

Optional:

Microsoft, Mouse Systems or Logitech mouse
HP LaserJet/compatible or LaserWriter laser printer

Laser printer drivers are available as optional add-on packs

FLEET STREET EDITOR is also available on the BBC Micro, Amstrad CPC Series, and Atari ST Series

Talk to your local PC dealer or contact us direct:

MIRRORSOFT

Maxwell House, 74 Worship Street, London EC2A 2EN
Tel: 01-377 4645 Fax: 01-377 0022 Telex: 886048 BPCC G

Time is money – Are you investing it well?

THE FACTS

Now there's a way of ensuring you are getting the maximum from your most limited resource. TimeKeeper is a professional time organiser in the form of a computer program available for today's standard business microcomputers. It simplifies many of the time management problems of today's offices by combining computer power with the simplicity of a desk top calendar.

With TimeKeeper, you can create and search on multiple diaries (called calendars). You can move or copy appointments from one calendar to another and you can print some, or all of your appointments. You can locate time openings across multiple calendars and schedule recurring events easily.

TimeKeeper displays appointments for any week along with a summary showing date, time, and the most pertinent information about each. You can display any week's appointments from 1st January 1981 to 31st December 2066. The graphic display shows a "week at a glance" reference or a three-monthly summary.

Every appointment has five text fields (so you can store any information you need to remember) and a "tickler" field to provide a reminder of those special events.

But TimeKeeper is not just limited to people appointments. You can store information in the form of places (the conference room?), things (office equipment?), areas (training facilities?), indeed just about anything you can think of.

THE SIMPLICITY

To schedule an appointment in TimeKeeper, just press the "schedule" key. It really is that simple! Anything you are ever likely to require from TimeKeeper is documented with a comprehensive set of on-screen "help" messages.

And to help you get started there are also three tour programs for use with a professionally prepared audio cassette and set of easy to follow, step by step tutorials. Within just a short space of time you will realise that TimeKeeper is so easy to use that you will be experimenting for yourself.

THE BENEFITS

With TimeKeeper, you can be certain you are organising your available time effectively. Know who? what? where? and when? instantly. See how much time is available at a glance. And be automatically reminded of all your important appointments so you'll never forget them.

STOP PRESS

Now available for the Amstrad 1512 series at a new low price.

Caxton Software Limited
10-14 Bedford Street
Covent Garden
London WC2E 9HE
Tel: 01-379 6502.
Telex: 27950 ref 398

TimeKeeper is £49.99 (inc VAT)!!!

Available for the Amstrad 1512 series, IBM-PC and compatibles.

See us at the Amstrad User Show

FLEET STREET

CITY OF LONDON EC4

Editor

£149.50 ● Mirrorsoft

You too could become a newspaper tycoon – Dave Prakel looks at Desktop Publishing on your PC

You might think from its title that this is a word processor. It is not. *Fleet Street Editor* is a 'personal publishing package'. Mirrorsoft already sells a program with the same name for the BBC micro, but the PC-compatible package reviewed here is no relation – it would appear that *Fleet Street Editor* is more a catch-all title for Mirrorsoft's range of desktop software. This program is a conversion of the American ClickArt *Personal Publisher* Package from T/Maker (selling for a remarkably low £149.50).

A word processor (WP) assembles and formats text for output to a printer. The finished result looks a lot like a typed report or letter, and though some WP packages allow you to integrate graphics written in related programs the text is still conventional 'typing'.

Personal Publishing software takes you one stage further into layout, typographical design and illustration. Working on already 'word processed' texts, *Fleet Street Editor* can design a booklet, letter or report around a range of typefaces and styles, and allows considerable flexibility over layout. It also lets you incorporate pictures from other programs or from a graphics library into your text.

GETTING STARTED

Fleet Street Editor has certain hardware requirements. The single disc Amstrad PC cannot run the program but the twin-disc version will. Although the package looks like a GEM program on screen it does not in fact run under *GEM Desktop*. A mouse is not essential as a NOMOUSE program is supplied which puts the mouse click function (essential for dragging blocks of copy or art about) onto the [f10] key on the standard IBM keyboard, but you have to remember to run NOMOUSE before you run PUBLISH.EXE. That said a mouse certainly makes things easier, despite the good conversion for keyboard.

For output you need a dot-matrix printer supporting IBM graphics. Better image quality will be achieved at a much higher cost with a laser printer – laser printer drivers come in an optional package available initially from Mirrorsoft at £90. Drivers for the Hewlett Packard laserwriter are available to coincide with the launch of *Fleet Street Editor*, and Canon Laserwriter drivers will be available later in the year.

The three discs that make up *Fleet Street Editor* are not copy protected. You get a system disc, a Font disc and a Graphics Library disc. Installation is straightforward on either hard disc or twin floppy systems.

Printer Installation – adapting the program to the idiosyncrasies of your particular make of printer – is also easy but there are only 28 printer options which may leave some users attempting to write their own printer definition file. Luckily the printer installation software allows you to do just this if you have the time, understanding and patience to plough through your printer manual. Mirrorsoft's Marketing Manager Pat Bitton felt that the existing drivers would cover most people's needs but agreed that some printer manufacturers 'claim the earth for compatibility and leave the software houses to take to consequences'.

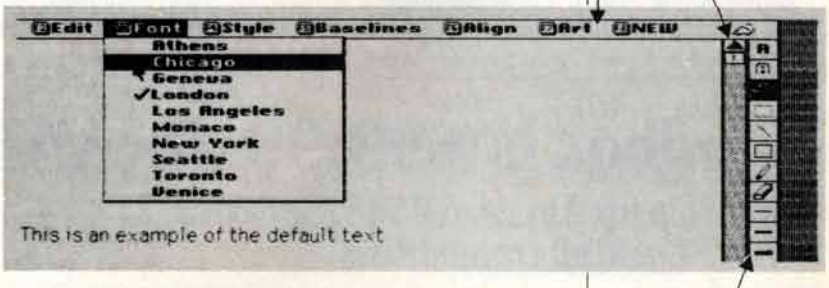
The manual supplied for review was a preliminary draft but, judging by Mirrorsoft's existing book for the Beeb version, documentation will be good; giving general tips as well as specific program information. The manual is presented as three 'Lessons' – Text, Art and Layout – followed by an alphabetically arranged section covering individual features; with Art and Font examples and a good section on planning and producing finished documents.

IN USE

The first thing you'll meet loading *Fleet Street Editor* is a tiny clock face. This means 'Wait'. You'll get quite used to looking at this clock as the program does spend a great deal of time in thought.

The top of the opening screen shows the *Top Menu*, with the *Tools* and *Elevator Bar* to the right. The Top Menu consists of a series of pull-down menus which open over the working area and give options which can be selected with the Mouse, the keyboard [Return], or often an Alt-Key combination. The Elevator Bar allows you to move the working window around on the document you are creating – you simply drag the page marker up or down the bar thereby sliding the page 'under' the window.

The Tools are selected with the [f9] key. Initially set to Text entry, Tools also gives you a selection of Graphics Text (text which can be manipulated using the Art functions and which is not subject to the grid layout for the real text), the Art Hand (the pointer/cursor for art manipulation), Outlining (for moving art and wrapping text around art areas), Line drawing (in three widths), plus a free-hand pencil, eraser, and box outline.



TOP MENU
A pull-down menu has been selected showing the range of fonts available

ELEVATOR BAR
Allows you to scroll the screen over your document

TOOLS
Icons can be 'clicked' to give you the tools of the trade

COPY PROTECTION

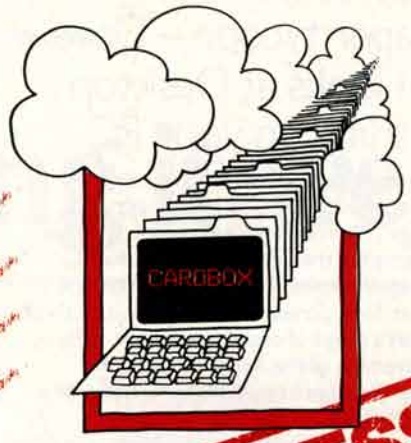
In an effort to prevent software piracy, software houses build code into their programs to prevent the average user copying them without permission. This can cause the legitimate owner problems though, as it means you can't take back-up copies of the software easily and so have to keep using your precious master copy all the time.

InfoWorld

Software Report Card

Cardbox

	Poor	*Fair*	*Good*	*Excellent*
Performance	☐	☐	☐	☑
Documentation	☐	☐	☐	☑
Ease of Use	☐	☐	☐	☑
Error Handling	☐	☐	☐	☑



STOP PRESS
Now available for the Amstrad 1512 series at a new low price.

Why settle for less?

OK – so you've never heard of InfoWorld. That's hardly surprising because it's published in America. It does however happen to be one of the most widely-read software magazines in the world.

When we launched Cardbox several years ago, we sent a copy to the editor. Because the Americans have software products coming out of their ears, it was an honour when he decided to publish a review for us. Even more of an honour when we discovered what he thought of it! Over the past five years you could probably count on your fingers the number of products that have achieved this sort of acclaim.

Cardbox is simply an electronic card-indexing system – a replacement for the cards on your desk.

It's famous for the speed, and flexibility with which it can find cards for you. Unlike the cards on your desk, you can have any number of keywords on the card, anywhere in the entire file. Personal Computer World said "...from my initial tests, the fastest of any package I've evaluated so far..."

But it's not only fast. You can design the layout of the cards completely to your own requirements and find cards easier than by any other method. In fact, Computing Today proclaimed "This product is totally idiot-proof!"

You wouldn't use Cardbox to design an invoicing system, or produce calculated reports – it wasn't designed for that. But you would use it for keeping track of your enquiries, customers, suppliers, product details, membership records, library details – or just about any other type of information you need to find quickly and easily. And because Cardbox links with CP/M word-processors like WordStar and New Word, if you require an easy to use, but superior mailing list facility, there's nothing better.

Furthermore, because Cardbox is so easy to use, we are able to offer you FREE and UNLIMITED telephone support. Should you need help just call us. Your call will be welcomed and your query will be answered in a pleasant, helpful and efficient manner – because that's the sort of people we are.

now **£59.99** inc VAT!!!

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Available for Amstrad 6128, 8256/8512, IBM PC and all compatibles.

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Tel: 01-379 6502.
Telex: 27950 ref 398

Though you can enter text directly on-screen this is not the ideal method – it is also very slow as the screen reformats between keystrokes. You can use the Insert command to open up existing text which overcomes this problem, but really you are expected to import text from existing ASCII files saved with the TXT extension.

PLANNING A DOCUMENT

The ideal procedure is to plan your document ahead. Let's assume that text from a word processor is ready, and you know where your graphics elements are coming from. You must next design the *grid* for the document. This is the most powerful aspect of *Fleet Street Editor*.

Bringing down the Baselines menu and accepting the [Alt-L] Layout option gives you a decision box (one of many throughout the program). This gives you the opportunity to set up the bare bones of your page: margins, line spacing, even the number of columns. These grids can be stored – a very powerful feature if you need layouts quickly: month by month for two different newsletters for example. At this point you can even choose between cm and inches for your measurements!

Taking the baselines' Adjust Below option switches on a series of *baselines* (underlining on the screen that shows where the text will go). Using the mouse to 'click' on one of the lines causes a set of 'handles' to appear which allow you to drag the left and right sides of the text column, or to move it vertically so that you can take, say, two lines up for a banner headline. You need some idea at this stage of the size of typeface you intend to use as this will affect the number of lines you can get on the page.

Once satisfied with the baselines layout you use the Get Text option under Edit to read your prepared text file into the clipboard buffer and then to paste it into the existing grid. The Get Text option can only deal with ASCII files with a TXT extension upto 5000 characters in length. Any TXT file loads into the clipboard for later pasting. Alternatively you can label your text with a PUB extension if you want more space and these load text automatically onto the page, but this is a less flexible method.

At this point you can select the required typeface, or change the size or style (Bold, Normal or Italic). The Font and Style options are both pull down menus. Any type size or style not available under a particular typeface comes up in low intensity video and cannot be selected. Using the Edit Paste function you load the text into the grid, and the text then wraps round and fills up the layout.

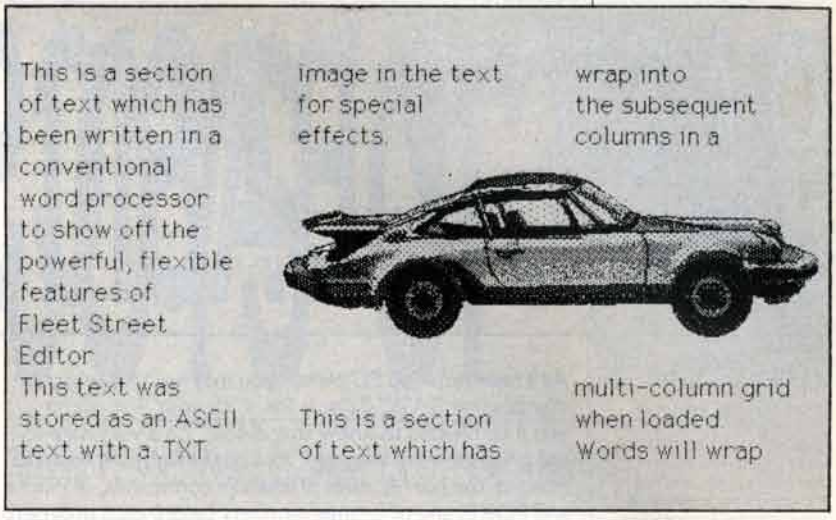
PUTTING IN PICTURES

Adding artwork is as simple. Loading from one of the MAC extension libraries you outline and save the piece of artwork you require. Then use the [f7] Art menu to load the image into the clipboard and the Art hand to slide it around on the document. Once in place you can Paste it in and then, using the [f6] Align function, wrap the text around the image. With a small typeface and big artwork this is very impressive.

The Art function allows you to duplicate, even Flip the image both vertically and horizontally or to 'invert' it, making the image negative. You can't change the size of the image within the document (though you could conceivably do this externally using *SNAPSHOT*).

If you've noticed a spelling mistake in the text you can use the Edit function to change a letter even at this late stage. Editing allows you to cut, copy and paste text. Just as an Art Editor in the real publishing world wouldn't be expected to make massive re-writes of copy, so too *Fleet Street Editor* is not set up for real word processing – after all that's what word processors are for.

The finished page can then be seen in miniature using the File [Alt-Z] function. Printing is as simple with the option of Draft or Final quality. Documents of up to 99 pages can be handled but *Fleet Street Editor* is more at home working with a dozen or so pages. The finished document can be saved with a PUB extension; *Fleet Street Editor* giving you choice of drive and sub-directory for all such loading and saving functions.



An example showing what can be done, using one of the sample pictures supplied with *Fleet Street Editor*

Perhaps the most powerful feature is *SNAPSHOT*; this is an external program, as is the related *SNAP2ART* program. *SNAPSHOT* is a Ram resident utility that will take a screen shot of anything, including other programs, at any time simply by using the [Shift-PrtScr] key (the computer beeps when you press the 'shutter').

The *SNAP2ART* program develops your pictures and lets you read about half the screen into an ART file for manipulation within the program. Using these simple utilities you can capture graphics from any of your programs and put them where you like in your document. *SNAP2ART* even allows scaling and magnification.

GOOD VALUE

You do get a lot for your money. Mirrorsoft's Pat Bitton said on pricing: 'We were worried we had underpriced the package for the PC market and that *FSE* would be perceived as a toy'. It's certainly no toy, but neither is it full-blown typesetting software. *Fleet Street Editor* lives in a peculiar no-man's land between integrated packages like *GEM Write/Paint* and specialised typesetting programs like Wordsmiths' *Typefit* or *Book Machine* from Prefis. Unlike *Pagemaker* on the Apple Mac *Fleet Street Editor* cannot, at present, drive 'real' typesetting machines.

Its specification does however fit the needs of many individuals, small businesses, charities, clubs etc who have the need for specially presented documents at low cost.

IBM GRAPHICS

Graphics is one of the non-standard aspects of the IBM PC standard. IBM does have its own standard, but this is not universally accepted by the industry. The Hercules standard is accepted by a large number of people, but is also by no means universal. We will be looking at the problems this can cause when we have had a chance to use the Amstrad PC in more depth.

This lack of standards extends to printers as well, and it is no easy matter setting up many printers to print out IBM graphics properly. Again, we will be looking at this problem in more depth in a later issue.

LASERWRITERS

These are essentially printers offering a very high quality of print – almost as high as the typeset quality you see on these pages. They are called 'Laserwriters' because they use a laser to print the characters on a page. The cheapest at the moment are around £2000, but prices are falling all the time.

PLUSES

- **Great value for £150.**
- **You can simultaneously change Font and Style.**
- **The photocopied manuscript and Mirrorsoft's documentation for the BBC *Fleet Street Editor* suggests a four-plus rating as far as the manual goes.**
- **Great for teachers, club secretaries and the budding Citizen Kane.**

MINUSES

- **Slow, but acceptable for the non-professional.**
- **More Art and Edit features would be nice - but that might be a bit greedy at £150!**
- **The Menus and Tools selection only scrolls down – miss the option and you have to go all the way round.**

RANGE OF FEATURES	■■■■□	OVERALL SPEED	■■□□□
EASE OF USE	■■■□□	DOCUMENTATION	■■■■□

***PC PLUS* VALUE VERDICT** ■■■■□

BASIC 2 BASICS

Gets to grips with Locomotive's powerful version of the BASIC programming language

THE FUTURE

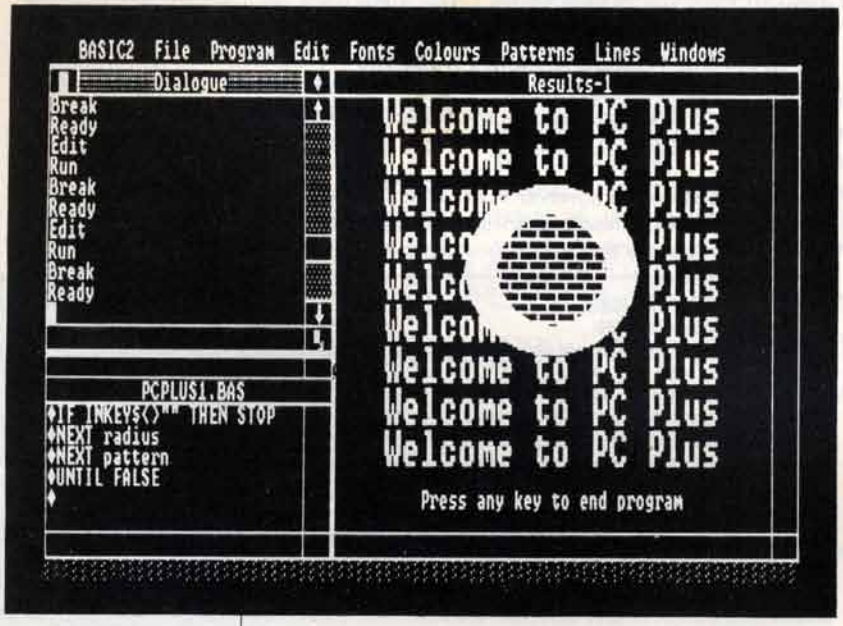
In the next few months *PC PLUS* will give you plenty of ideas on how to use *BASIC 2*, show you how its many commands work, and how they can be put together to make useful and entertaining programs. When you get the hang of it send us your listings, and any hints and tips that might be useful to other readers. We look forward to publishing the best in these pages.

As a new Amstrad PC owner you may wonder what the disc labelled *BASIC 2* disc is for. If it's your first micro you'll be pleased to know that *BASIC 2* is a very easy-to-use programming language. As a beginner you'll find that many of the horrific tales of obscure commands, of PEEKs and POKEs and of strange numbers before each program line are things of the past as far as this new version of BASIC is concerned. If you've used other BASICs, on earlier Amstrad micros or other makes of computer, you'll be pleasantly surprised by *BASIC 2*.

The single most interesting feature of *BASIC 2* is that it runs under the GEM system (see later article). It is the first full version of the BASIC language to do this, and allows you to write your own programs which can make use of windows, icons, a mouse and the screen pointer. *BASIC 2* has powerful graphics commands to let you produce a wide variety of graphs, charts or other pictures. It can also deal with files on disc, giving you the opportunity to write programs to handle name and address lists, stock control or simple accounts.

```
CLS
WINDOW OPEN
text$="Welcome to PC Plus"
FOR row=2 TO 18 STEP 2
PRINT POINTS(20) AT(6;row) text$
NEXT
PRINT AT(10;20)"Press any key to end program"
REPEAT
FOR pattern=1 TO 38
FOR radius=50 TO 1000 STEP 50
CIRCLE 2500;3000,radius FILL WITH pattern
IF INKEY$<>"" THEN STOP
NEXT radius
NEXT pattern
UNTIL FALSE
```

The example program and the *Basic 2* screen showing the result of running the program



USING BASIC 2

You run *BASIC 2* by inserting a copy of the GEM desktop and *BASIC 2* disc, running GEM and selecting the big 'B' icon in the top GEM window. Once *BASIC 2* is loaded it displays three windows, labelled 'Dialogue', 'Edit' and 'Results-1', with a menu bar along the top. If you don't understand any of these terms then have a look at the article on GEM.

The Edit and Results windows are blank to start with, but the Dialogue window contains the copyright notice and BASIC's 'Ready' prompt. This is the window where you type commands such as SAVE and LOAD to move programs to and from disc, and RUN to set them going.

When you load a program, such as DEMO (supplied on the *BASIC 2* disc), the program itself appears in the Edit window. You can examine it more closely by typing EDIT, followed by hitting the [RETURN] key. The cursor (the small black rectangle) moves to the pointer's position. If you need more room to see the program, click on the diamond in the corner of the window and it will enlarge to fill the screen. Click on the diamond again and the window shrinks back to its previous size. To run the DEMO program, leave the Edit window by pointing anywhere in the Dialogue window and clicking the mouse button. When the cursor returns to the Dialogue window type RUN and the [RETURN] key.

The results of DEMO, the wording and graphics appear in three Results windows: the original 'Results-1' window and two others the program opens. As you can see if you run the DEMO program, you can display text in several different sizes (even upside down), draw shapes very quickly, fill them with many different patterns and calculate the results of complex formulae.

OVER TO YOU

On this page is a simple program in *BASIC 2*. Type it in and see what it does. Pull down the Program menu from the menu bar at the top of the screen and select the 'New' option. this clears the DEMO program from the computer. Move to the Edit window and type in each line of the example program printed here. You can type everything in lower case, as *BASIC 2* recognises all its own 'keywords' (such as PRINT, CIRCLE and REPEAT) and automatically changes them to capitals when you press [RETURN] at the end of each line. Once you've typed the program inyou can see what it does by returning to the Dialogue window and entering RUN.

You can, of course, ignore *BASIC 2* and run only ready-made applications on your Amstrad PC. But it would be a great shame to ignore the potential of this modern, well designed programming language.

JOYS OF GEM

Simon Williams starts a regular series

If you've owned other micros before your Amstrad PC, you may already have heard of GEM. It's been around for over a year now, and is getting increasingly popular with manufacturers of PCs and of course with Atari, who use it on their ST range. If your PC is your first micro, then you're in for a pleasant surprise: GEM makes a computer a lot easier to use than you may have been led to believe.

Conventional micros would have you type commands at the keyboard. The micro's screen would normally issue a prompt (often in the form A>) to show you where to type, and would expect you to key the command in a pre-set form. A typical command to read the directory of a disc would be DIR, and directory, cat or catalogue would not do. The user was obliged to learn a series of these commands to do simple things such as copying or deleting files or to change the machine's characteristics.

The reason for this technique was that many early micros had very limited screen-handling. Few could show graphics on the screen and nearly all relied on the keyboard for all input.

A few years back, Apple computers introduced a very expensive micro called Lisa, which offered a radically different approach. The machine displayed much of its information graphically on the screen, and control of the micro was shared between the keyboard and a small hand-held unit called a *mouse*. Moving the mouse around on a desktop moved a pointer on the screen, and a button on top of the mouse was used to select one function from a list displayed on the screen.

This system of working (in jargon, this *environment*) was adopted on Apple's Macintosh micro, a much less expensive computer which has enjoyed sales second only to IBM's PC. Lots of micro users argued that it was the easy-to-use environment that appealed so much on the Mac, and several manufacturers asked, 'Why can't we do the same thing on an IBM PC?'

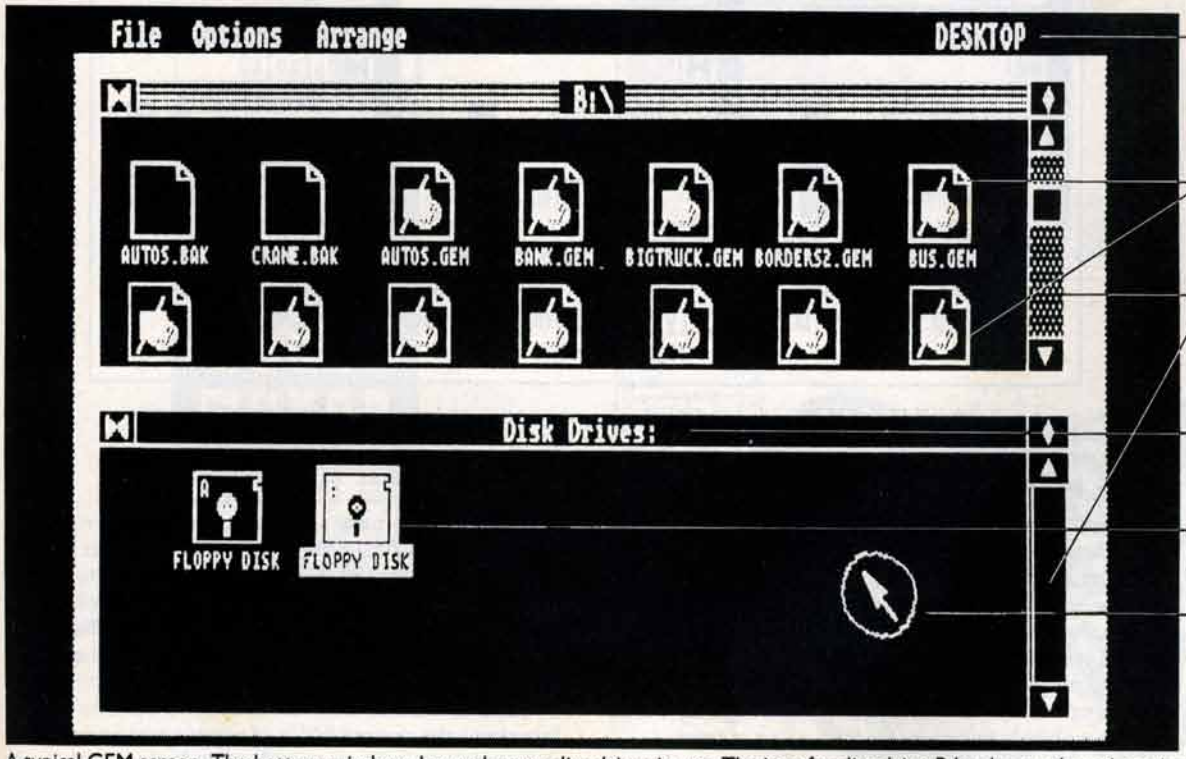
One of the answers was GEM, from Digital Research. It offers the same kind of graphics environment as the Apple computers, but on a wide range of PC-compatible micros.

WHAT IS GEM?

GEM is a 'Graphics Environment Manager' that you control with a mouse. It removes the need to learn a lot of different commands to control your micro, but instead displays symbols on the screen to represent disc drives and the subdirectories and files on them. These symbols are usually known as *icons*.

When you run GEM Desktop (the file-handling part of GEM) on your Amstrad PC the display is divided into three main parts. Two large areas of the screen are displayed as windows.

Windows are widely used in GEM to mark out sets of information. Often there is more information than can be displayed in the window at one time, and GEM allows you to move the information around behind the window, so you can see any part of it. It's something like using a magnifying glass on a map: you can move the sheet around under the lens and see the details of any part of the map. The difference is that the window is the only view you get.



A typical GEM screen. The bottom window shows the two disc drives in use. The icon for disc drive B has been selected, so the top window shows some of the files on the disc in drive B. Scrolling, using the slider in the scroll bar, would reveal the rest of the files on that disc

FILES
A *file* is a part of a disc which holds a particular piece of information; it might be a Basic program, a text file from a word-processor or a picture from a drawing or painting application. Any program or its data can be stored on a disc file. The word 'file', for once in the world of computers, is quite a good term – a disc file serves a very similar purpose to the conventional files you might use at home or in the office.

WIMPS
The four components of the GEM system – Windows, Icons, a Mouse and a Pointer – have given their initial letters to an acronym which is often used for this kind of operating system. It's known, believe it or not, as a *WIMP* environment.

The bottom window in GEM Desktop show icons of the disc drive(s) connected to your micro. The files on the selected drive are displayed in the top window. If you have two drives connected to your PC, you can select the second drive by moving the mouse, which moves the pointer (a small slanted arrow), to point at that drive's icon – then press the mouse button to select it.

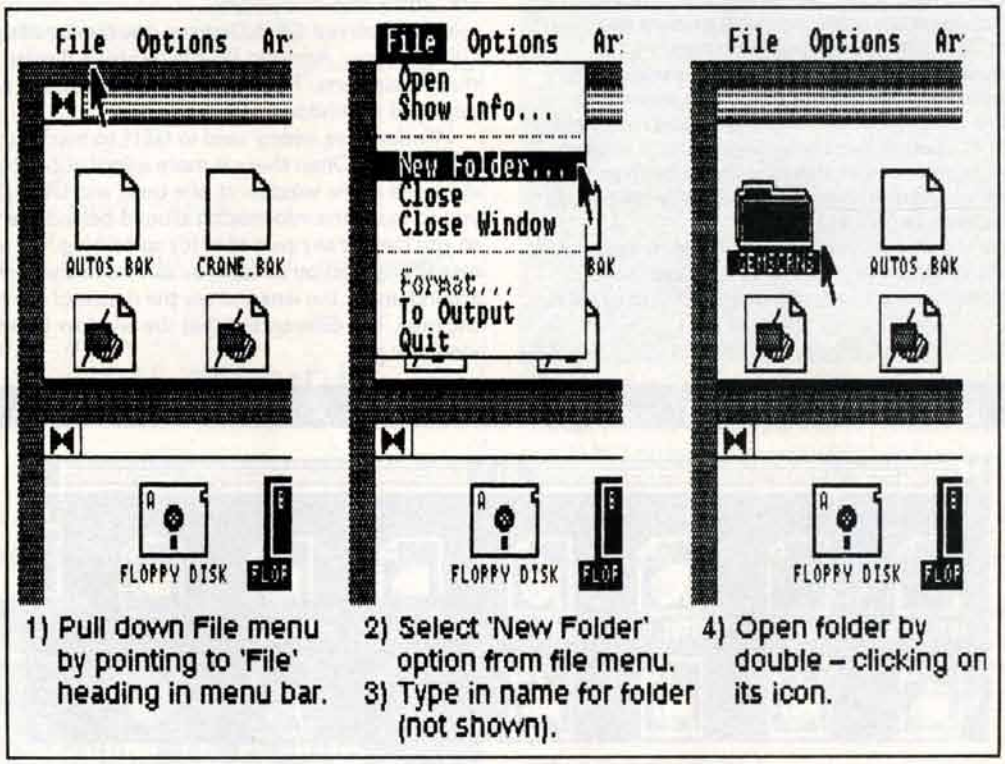
Selecting an icon in this way is known as *clicking*. So to display the files on the second drive of a twin-drive system, you would click on that drive's icon.

To scroll the information through a window, use the slider on the right-hand side of the window (see diagram). 'Drag' the slider up or down the scroll bar, and move the whole window around the screen by dragging it by its title bar. Clicking on the bow-tie icon in the top-left corner of the window switches it off, and the window and its contents disappear from the screen. *Dragging* involves pointing at the icon to be dragged and then pressing and holding down the mouse button while moving the mouse. The icon appears to be attached to the pointer while you do this, and moves with it. As soon as you release the mouse button, the icon stays in its new position on the screen, and you can move the pointer normally again. The top window on the GEM Desktop screen shows all the files and folders on the selected disc. Each file is displayed in this window as a file icon with the filename underneath it. If you want to run a program from the Desktop, you point to that file's icon and double-click (press the mouse button twice in quick succession). The icon is displayed in inverse video (in negative) to show it has been selected, and the program loads from disc and runs.

If the program is written to work under GEM, like *Locomotive's Basic 2*, then when you leave it you automatically return to the Desktop. Some non-GEM programs also allow GEM to return when you quit them. If they don't, you have to reload GEM from scratch.

A *folder* is GEM's version of a sub-directory. When you have a lot of files connected with a particular application – many programs written in *Basic 2* or several text files written with a word-processor – it's often convenient to collect them all together and put them into a folder. You can label the folder 'Basic' or 'w/p', and the separate files don't then clutter up the main file display until you select the folder.

You can have one folder within another. You might have a general folder called 'W/P' containing other folders labelled 'Letters', 'Invoices' and 'Statements'. You can have many levels of folder, one inside another, to help keep your files in order.



Three stages in the sequence of actions you would use to create a new GEM folder

THE MENU BAR

The third area of the screen is the *menu bar*. This is the strip along the top which contains a number of different headings. If you point to any of these, a menu of different options associated with that heading rolls down over the screen. As you move the pointer over the menu, each option in turn is highlighted in inverse video.

If you pull down the 'File' menu, for instance, you see several options concerned with manipulating files. Unless you have already selected a file icon, some of these options will appear faint in the menu. This means that they are not currently available.

This is what each option does:

New folder creates a new empty folder for you to put your files in. You type in a name for it and its icon is then added to those currently on display in the top window. If you then open the folder by double-clicking on it, the window will be blank until you copy files into it or create new ones. The sequence is shown in the diagram.

Close and **Close window** are similar options. The first closes the current folder (if one is open) or removes the window from the screen if you're looking at the main file display. The second closes any number of folder levels and the main file window in one go.

To output takes you to a separate part of GEM Desktop which allows you to print out a file from any GEM program, including parts of the screens themselves. The screendumps which accompany this article were produced using Output.

Quit is self-explanatory. It closes any files you have open and leaves GEM, taking you back to DOS Plus or MS-DOS.

Each of the other headings in the menu bar has a similar menu with a series of options to help control your micro. Even the Desktop heading conceals a menu of its own, and three accessories supplied with GEM: the clock, the calendar and the snapshot.

The clock

This accessory simulates a small desk clock, which you can call up by pulling down the Desktop menu and clicking on the clock option.

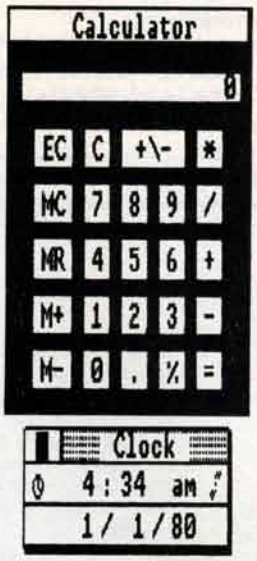
The clock contains a small window of its own, displaying the time on one line, the date beneath. You can set any part of the time and date by pointing to it, clicking the mouse button and typing in the figures you want. The clock works on a 12-hour system, with an English-style date (day/month/year).

The clock also has an alarm, set by clicking on the very small clock-face icon to the left of the time display. This icon changes to a bell, and you can set the alarm time in the same way as the clock time. You switch the alarm on by clicking on the musical note on the right of the time display.

The calculator

Activate this accessory in the same way as the clock, and a large calculator opens up on the screen. You can enter numbers by pointing to them and clicking the mouse button, or by entering them from the keyboard. As with the clock, you can call up the calculator no matter what else is displayed on the GEM screen.

The calculator has a memory and percent keys. You complete your calculations by clicking on the equals symbol, or by pressing Return on the keyboard.



The snapshot

This is one of the most useful features of GEM. It allows you to copy any section of a GEM screen to a disc file. This may not at first seem much use, but it allows you to carry information from one GEM application to another, or to print out screen images via the Output program. You can, for instance, carry a section of formatted text from GEM Write (the word-processor) into GEM Paint (the art program), add diagrams to it there, and then print out all or any part of it.

To use Snapshot you select the option from the Desktop menu; a small window opens with the icon of a camera and a large question-mark in it. Click on the question-mark and a set of instructions on how to use Snapshot appears on the screen. Click on the camera icon and a selector box opens.

A *selector box* displays files on the screen when GEM wants you to pick one for loading or saving. In this case you can either pick an existing file or type in the name of a new one. Whichever you do, Snapshot uses that as the file in which it records the screen image.

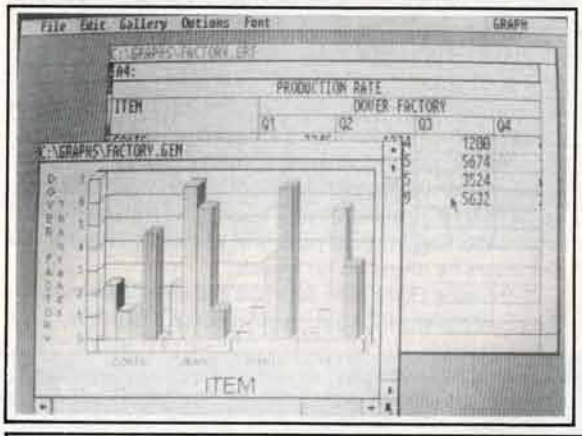
Once you've selected your file, the selector box disappears and the pointer turns into a crosshair. Move the crosshair to the top-left corner of the area you want to copy and press and hold the mouse button. As you move the pointer down and to the right, an elastic rectangle stretches out between the pointer and its position when you first pressed the mouse button.

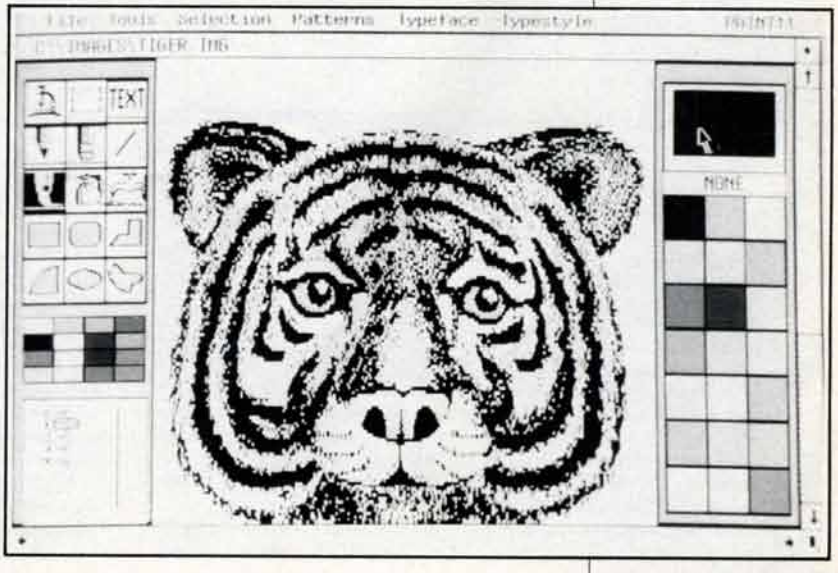
When you've completely enclosed the area you want to copy, release the mouse button. Snapshot then copies the marked area into your selected disc file. Clicking on the bow-tie icon switches off Snapshot.

WORKING WITH GEM

There is quite a lot more to be said about GEM Desktop. We haven't even touched on moving, copying and deleting files.

Over the next months we will look at the GEM system and other GEM-based packages in more depth. But once you've mastered a few basic techniques you'll find working with GEM very straightforward and a lot easier than all the commands DOS Plus or MS-DOS require.





OUT SOON...

Simon Williams' book *Mastering Dos Plus* is published next month by Sigma Technical Press. It covers all aspects of the Dos Plus operating system and contains chapters on GEM and Basic 2 for Amstrad PC users.

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

Your Amstrad PC is not just a business machine – the days when you had to choose between a machine for pleasure and a machine for business are gone. In the States the IBM PC generated a whole market for 'leisureware' (a particularly nasty Americanism!) and other such activities. The advent of affordable PCs here means a growing home market too.

GAMES

The two areas that immediately spring to mind are games and programming: the urge to play and the urge to create programs of your own. The games market is growing fast for the PC, and prices are falling too. It will never compete with machines such as the Amstrad CPC models for sheer quantity, but the comparative power and capacity of the PC means that what games there are tend to be good.

Games on the PC are not just the typical shoot-em-ups found in most arcades, as the three reviewed here show. *The Hobbit*, closely following Tolkien's fantasy masterpiece, is a top selling adventure game on smaller home micros. It is like a living book in which you decide what Bilbo Baggins does next, and you talk to the various characters he meets on his travels.

Microsoft's *Flight Simulator*, on the other hand, uses the power of the PC to put you in control of a light aircraft, and accurately simulates your flight as you bank and turn (and probably crash) through its imaginary landscape. And finally Mirrorsoft's *GATO* finds you the commander of a submarine, planning your strategy against the enemy fleet. As you can see, prices are quite high at the moment, but will probably come down as the Amstrad PC takes off.

PROGRAMMING

On the programming side there are many powerful languages and utilities available for the huge PC market already, and it's a powerful and fast machine in comparison to most 'home' models. With Locomotive Basic and the GEM system you can create professional programs controlled by mice and using the whole range of windows and pull-down menus available.

GRAPHICS

Moreover the PC can also be used as a powerful drawing tool, as those of you who have played with *GEM Paint* or *Draw* will have already found out. Computer Art is a recognised form these days, and the PC can make quite an alternative to a paint brush. Again its power and speed, coupled with a good colour screen resolution, give it an edge over the ordinary home micro.

MUSIC

With suitable interfaces the PC can control fully fledged synthesisers using the standard MIDI system. With the right software it becomes a composition tool on which you can write music for whole banks of synthesisers. The MIDI standard has meant that a whole range of synthesisers, drum machines and even guitars can control and be controlled by your PC. MIDI software is under development now for the Amstrad PC.

COMMUNICATIONS

All of this assumes you are using your PC on its own, but through the RS232 port on the back you can connect it to other micros anywhere in the world. All you need is a 'modem', suitable communications software, and a handy BT phone socket – and you're in touch with the world of computer communications.

The cheapest way of entering this world is through the amateur Bulletin Boards. These are run by other comms enthusiasts on micros often similar to your PC. Their micro is permanently connected to a special type of

MODEMS

A modem is a piece of gadgetry that translates the output of your computer into a form that can be sent down ordinary telephone lines. Modems can cost anything from around £75 to over £1000, depending on the facilities they offer. Some come with the software required to use them thrown in, which is useful as it is then bound to be compatible. We will be looking at the modems, comms software and on-line services available in more depth in a later issue of *PC-PLUS*.

MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME

GATO

£29.95 ● Mirrorsoft

If *Flight Simulator* tries to mimic action in the air, Spectrum Holobyte's *Gato* tries to do the same underwater. *Gato*, apart from being the Spanish for cat, was the name given to a class of US submarine in the Pacific theatre of World War II – and the game puts you in command of the USS Growler, pride of the class of '42.

The game board is a set of 16 square quadrants, some with islands and some without; and the aim of the game is to tour the board carrying out whatever missions are set by the Commander Submarine Force Pacific Fleet, or Comsubpac for short. The first mission is given when you start the game; the PC's speaker bleeps in accurate Morse code and makes teletype clacks as Comsubpac's instructions come over the airwaves and onto the screen, a letter at a time.

The normal screen display is reminiscent of *Flight Simulator*, with a conning-tower view at the top and instruments showing depth, heading, speed, and supplies at the bottom. Other views, covering the whole screen, are called up by appropriate keys, and include an ocean chart – the whole game board – a local quadrant chart, a radar screen, and a damage-control screen showing any problems on a diagram of the Growler.

Within the limitations of a playable game, Spectrum Holobyte has included as much realism as it can. The diesel engines will not work underwater, although the electric motors will; the oxygen supply dwindles while the sub is submerged; and the captain must remember to open the torpedo tube doors before firing a torpedo.

But the overall impression of *Gato* is rather poor. It is slow, the graphics and colours are poor, and the lack of multiple views on the main screen makes game play difficult as you try to reconcile the information from the different displays. Still, if you like games like this you will like this game.

modem that sits on their phone line waiting to hear from another computer such as yours. Once you are 'logged on' you are in control of the Bulletin Board computer (at least as far as the owner allows you!) and can wander through a system of menus that gives you access to news, messages and tips left by other users.

Bulletin Boards are free, except for the phone bill of course! But if your pocket permits you can log on to the larger professional services such as Prestel or Telecom Gold. These are far faster and more powerful than the amateur bulletin boards, largely because they run on large mainframe computers rather than cheap micros, but they charge for your use of their machines.

To give you an example, Prestel currently has in excess of 350,000 screenfuls of information that you can browse through at your leisure. These include information from over 1200 'information providers', who include banks, travel agents, tourist offices and shops, to list but a few. There are also massive games, comprehensive messaging and even chatlines – on-going conversations that you can chip into as you wish.

If you are feeling adventurous you can contact MUD – Multi User Dungeon. This is a huge adventure game originally created by computer students at Essex University, and now available to anyone with a modem. It plays like a conventional adventure game, but it can be played by many people at the same time; so the other characters you meet could be real people playing the game from hundreds of miles away.

If you are feeling really fleece then you could log on to some of the big databases in the States. Comms in the States is far more advanced than here and, like many things from across the Atlantic, rather more extravagant and bizarre To the comms enthusiast it is an electronic fantasy come true.

To give you some idea of its scale, just one database there – DIALOG – holds over 90 million items of information at any one time, with a storage capacity of 100 Gigabytes. Another service, The Source, receives tens of thousands of calls every day; and has large bulletin boards dealing with aircraft, antiques, art, astrology, cars, games, festivals, ham radio, music, pets and soap operas to mention about one percent of them.

Comms can be an expensive hobby, but it can pay for itself too. In America the database CompuServe offers the full text of the 22-volume *World Book Encyclopedia*. In the UK the Blaise database contains records on every book published here since 1950. There are numerous financial services too, so comms can be a real asset to your business life – as well as great fun.

MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME REVIEW ● MIN

THE HOBBIT

£29.95 ● Melbourne House

There is no doubt that The Hobbit **was one of the most influential adventure games in the home-computer business, spawning various imitators, hint books and endless bug reports. It had complex sentence input, other characters wandering around, the ability to talk to those characters and work with them as a team, and the definite plus of being based on a true classic book from J.R.R. Tolkien, a book that was thrown in with the package.**

And now it is on the PC. But the adventure-game market is very different once you move up from the Spectrum to disk-based machines, and now The Hobbit **has to compete with products from the likes of Infocom and Sierra On-Line. Those products have – guess what? – complex sentence input and other characters who can be talked to and worked with, normally in a more intuitive way than in Melbourne House's much-touted 'Inglish'. They may miss the Tolkien connection, since Melbourne House has that stitched up, but the book itself has been dropped from the PC version's packaging and** The Hobbit **has to go unsupported into battle with established names on their PC turf.**

And playing The Hobbit **on the PC just brings home how much it was forgiven for the fact that it ran on a Spectrum at all. It is, frankly, not a very good adventure when played purely in text, and the graphics are slow to draw and not worth looking at when they finish. The number of locations is small, the puzzles capricious, and the 'Animaction' of Thorin and Gandalf wandering around to little purpose is a bore.**

No attempt has been made to beef up the product for the PC market, and even with 128K RAM to play with – it was originally done for the ill-fated PC Junior in the US market, which set that limit – the print function is missed out because of 'lack of memory'.

In the world of PC adventures, The Hobbit **is one of the most famous, and worth a look for nostalgia value. But state-of-the-art it ain't.**

MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME REVIEW ● MINI GAME

FLIGHT SIMULATOR

£45 ● Microsoft

When the IBM PC was new, and clone was still a biological term, Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* was just about the only game available on the PC. And after five years of impromptu use as a PC compatibility tester and occasional recreation, the original is still going strong.

It's use as a clone test is understandable, since the package digs right down into the hardware guts of the PC to do its work. But why its longevity as a commercial product?

The simple answer is originality, for originality is a rare thing in computer games. The idea of a flight simulator on

anything less than a 32-bit superminicomputer was ridiculous in 1981, and the idea of producing anything remotely realistic was even less likely. It's a measure of the quality of the program that professional pilots, like everyone else, found *Flight Simulator* realistic and gripping, and a measure of the quality of the idea behind it that it spawned a host of home-computer copies.

The idea is that you are the pilot of a Piper monoplane, sitting on the runway at O'Hare International Airport, Chicago. The aim is to get the plane into the air, keep it there, and either land back at Chicago or fly to one of the several other destinations – complete with airports – provided on disk.

And that is about it. The controls mimic those of the Piper original, the instruments displayed permanently on the screen do likewise, and the view through the windscreen slides and spins with realistic vertigo.

Of course the graphics are poor and barely recognisable as landscape, and the colour scheme on the pathetic IBM-standard colour graphics adaptor is painful. But here that's not the point; *Flight Simulator* is an authentic original that is realistic, difficult, and a challenge to the intelligent games player. And that combination of features is altogether too rare in the computer games market today.

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THE GOOD SOFTWARE FILE

These pages represent a comprehensive guide to software on the Amstrad PCW machines. We've set out to cover every piece of software we could lay our hands on and give you enough information on each one to enable you to decide which titles are likely to be suitable for what you need.

As well as a brief summary of the programs, we've listed their main Plus and Minus points. And those we think are particularly good have an elliptical flash on the title bar saying why we recommend them.

The programs are divided into eight categories. And if you're thinking of buying one of the "big three" packages – word processor, spreadsheet or database – but have never actually used one, then you'll find the introductions to these sections essential reading. They tell you why you would want such software at all, and what are the vital features that you ought to be looking for.

Increasingly the boundaries between the package types are becoming fuzzy. If you think you want a database to hold your address list, you probably really want a word processor with a mail merger utility. If you think you want a spreadsheet to analyse you business costs, you may find a programmable database more useful. Read the descriptions below to see which suits you best.. And have fun window-shopping...

WORD-PROCESSORS

The PCW already comes bundled with a free word processor, LocoScript, so you might not think of buying another one as a priority. In fact, whatever you may have read in magazines, LocoScript is a pretty good word processor and you won't find many editing and layout functions that it doesn't have. Its principal disadvantage is speed – to move around a document of more than a couple of pages is like running through quick-setting cement.

So the main argument for change is to make life easier if you are regularly editing long documents (5 pages and over). Once you've decided to take the plunge you will find there are other advantages to be had. For one, you often get a spelling checker thrown in free – look for one which allows its dictionary to be modified so you can include non-American spellings.

Many other word processors have a built in "mail merger" program. This is a way of doing bulk mailshots; you store your address list in a data file, and write a letter with labelled gaps where you want the names and addresses to go. Then, when you print, the letter comes out once for each address, with the the information in its correct place.

One thing's for sure, whatever word processor you buy it will be totally different to operate from LocoScript. The PCW keyboard is custom built to run LocoScript, so if you change you will have to get used to some arcane choices of keys to do even simple operations. Also, you won't be able (very easily) to use all the printer styles that you can from LocoScript, although there will be enough to get by with.

LocoScript

bundled free with PCW machines • Locomotive Software

INCLUDED FOR COMPARISON

This is the standard PCW word processor. It makes by far the best use of the hardware of any word processor, and can do true proportional spaced printing, so why should you buy anything else? Well, the menu system is a little obscure at first, and you will need to use the manual a lot. Painfully slow with large documents, but if all you will ever do is 1 or 2 page letters, you would be silly to buy another word processor.

PLUSES • MINUSES

- ⊞ It's free!
- ⊞ Uses the printer and keyboard very well
- ⊞ Copes well with most editing functions, including block moves
- ⊞ Plenty of powerful features such as templates and phrases
- ⊟ Very slow with long (3 pages or more) documents
- ⊟ Bad at creating non-document files (e.g. program text), and interacting with CP/M
- ⊟ No mail merge, spell checker or word counter as standard
- ⊟ Documentation needs better organising

Pocket WordStar

£49.95 • MicroPro/Davis Rubin Associates.

To many business users, word processing means using WordStar. Almost every feature you could need in a text processor is here and despite the title this "Pocket" version has all the features of the original. It has also been customised to use the PCW's full screen width and some of the keypad keys. However the program can be difficult to learn and some of the margin and formatting commands are cumbersome. Efficient, and it has earned its colours in active combat, but it is now showing its age and there are alternatives unless you are committed to WordStar already. For £20 extra you can buy a version which includes the spell checker SpellStar.

PLUSES • MINUSES

- ⊞ Probably the world's most widely used word-processor
- ⊞ Documentation is complex but well structured
- ⊞ Includes a mail merge utility
- ⊞ The keystroke commands are fully described on on-screen menus
- ⊞ You can save your own favourite customised version
- ⊟ Doesn't make full use of the PCW keyboard and printer
- ⊟ Page and margin formatting commands are awkward to use
- ⊟ Complex and difficult to master thoroughly.

NewWord

£69.00 • NewStar Software

GOOD VALUE!

NewWord sets out to exploit the WordStar market by doing just the same job but better. It uses much the same key commands as WordStar, and will even edit WordStar document files. It comes with a spelling checker. On-screen help is much better than WordStar, but the commands, being restricted by compatibility, are still as obscure.

PLUSES • MINUSES

- ⊞ Can do everything WordStar can, and even edit WordStar files
- ⊞ Makes good use of the PCW screen — actually shows underlining and bold text.
- ⊞ Clearer help messages than WordStar and good tutorial manual.
- ⊞ Has full reformatting of text within its mail merge
- ⊞ Good spelling checker as part of the price
- ⊞ Can un-erase words and lines – useful for moving them rapidly
- ⊟ Weak on use of the keypad and printer support
- ⊟ Many of WordStar 's disadvantages too, like formatting troubles and obscure commands.

THE GOOD SOFTWARE FILE

WORD-PROCESSORS UTILITIES

Tasword 8000
£24.95 • Tasman Software

An established word processor that is well tried and tested on Amstrad's CPC machines. Tasword's strength is its printer handling — it provides a host of customisation options for different printers, and a variety of print fonts too. But if you enjoy moving blocks of text around to see how they look in different places, Tasword will let you down for speed.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Clear, well structured on-screen help menus
- ⊞ A variety of printer controls and fonts available
- ⊞ Includes a reasonable mail merge program
- ⊞ Moving around big files is fast
- ⊞ You can easily create and save a customised version of the program
- ⊟ Doesn't treat [RETURN] as a character — it can misunderstand where paragraph breaks are
- ⊟ Reformatting text blocks is quirky
- ⊟ Documentation is a bit brief
- ⊟ The search and replace function is limited and very slow

SuperWriter
£49.95 • Sorcim/Software City

RAW BUT POWERFUL!

A very comprehensive package, with spell checker and mail merge included, and the ability to execute commands from stored files. Full range of commands and formats, and on-screen help can be obtained. It's very fast at block operations and moving around, and reformats paragraphs in a flash. Very good value, but not much effort has gone into adapting it for the PCW.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Very fast at searching and moving around files
- ⊞ Sophisticated mail merge includes conditional print options
- ⊞ Spell checker can be easily customised
- ⊞ Complex commands can be executed from files
- ⊞ Excellent documentation, including a quick reference card and on-screen help menus
- ⊟ Can't edit files longer than 30K or so at once
- ⊟ Some of the documentation is only applicable to IBM PCs
- ⊟ No proportional spacing, and configuring the printer is difficult

LocoMail
£49.95 • Locomotive Software/Amstrad

BEST BUY!

As a mailmerger for LocoScript documents, it's difficult to see how anything could be much better than this. It runs directly from LocoScript, so you never have to use CP/M, and can process any LocoScript commands. Has many advanced features, and is highly recommended for all LocoScript users.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ You don't have to boot CP/M to run it
- ⊞ Can print any LocoScript text formatting commands
- ⊞ Can automatically rejustify paragraphs after insertion
- ⊞ Can insert numeric calculations into letters
- ⊞ Can conditionally include or omit chunks of text
- ⊞ Large, clear manual, with example files on disc
- ⊟ No way to sort and filter addresses before a print run
- ⊟ Can't be used with non-LocoScript files

Dataflow III and Mailflow III
£49.95 • Micro Power

Designed as an integrated mailmerge package, it is awkward to use although can achieve good quality results. You have to convert LocoScript files to ASCII, which is annoying. The database section is not easy to use. It's worth a look if you want to mailmerge non-LocoScript files, but not otherwise.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Can put bold, underlining etc. into non-LocoScript files
- ⊞ Can presort and preselect records for merging
- ⊞ Automatically rejustifies text paragraphs
- ⊟ Doesn't read unconverted LocoScript documents
- ⊟ For an "integrated" program, it runs in several different stages.
- ⊟ The database section is longwinded to use
- ⊟ For the same money, you can buy LocoMail.

Prospell
£29.95 • Arnor

GOOD VALUE!

This is a stand-alone spelling checker suitable for use with almost all word processors that run on the PCW machines. It can read LocoScript, WordStar and plain ASCII files. It flags up each wrong word as it finds it, and allows you to alter it directly, view the context, change the dictionary etc. Speed is not startling, but acceptable. Good overall.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Can check LocoScript and WordStar documents directly
- ⊞ Can display the context of a word to remind you what it should be
- ⊞ Can edit misspellings directly from Prospell
- ⊞ Can update the dictionary interactively
- ⊞ It has anagram and crossword solver utilities too
- ⊟ It processes files of more than 15k or so in separate sections
- ⊟ You can't copy the dictionary to the M: drive for speed

BrainStorm
£49.95 • Caxton Software

UNIQUE!

An "ideas processor", BrainStorm is a computerised doodling pad. You can jot phrases down randomly, then organise them into a hierarchy, then expand each phrase into a finished idea, and finally print them out as a coherent document. If you find it easier to work at a keyboard than with a pencil and paper, this will really help you think.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ No limit to the number of sub-levels of plan you can have
- ⊞ You can output the rough text for a wordprocessor to polish
- ⊞ Good documentation, including some neat ideas for applications
- ⊞ Provides a unique service, which should be useful to you
- ⊟ Needs better graphics (like GEM ?) to let you browse the structure easily
- ⊟ The command keystrokes are unnatural — you can't use the cursor keys to move around the screen
- ⊟ As a word processor, it is very primitive
- ⊟ A notepad and a pencil would cost you £1 or less

UTILITIES

SmartKey
£49.99 • Caxton Software

SmartKey is a utility to customise your keyboard for the applications that you regularly use. Keys can be defined to mean other keys, or whole paragraphs of text. These definitions can be used within other CP/M programs like wordprocessors, and even set up from within them.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Key definitions can be used and even set up within CP/M programs
- ⊞ Definitions can be saved and loaded later
- ⊞ Good manual makes it simple to use
- ⊟ The control keys are badly chosen; e.g. "\" doesn't appear on the normal PCW keyboard
- ⊟ Can't correct typing errors with [DEL] while defining keys
- ⊟ Seems vastly overpriced – you might find that the free CP/M SETKEYS utility does all you need

Pertmaster
£69.00 • Abtex Software/NewStar

Pertmaster is a project planning aid. You specify the events, sequencing and durations of the component tasks of a project, and Pertmaster will analyse the job by Critical Path Analysis. It can produce reports, crude graphical summaries, and detect errors.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ PERT charts and Critical Path Analysis are established planning methods
- ⊞ Up to 500 activities may be considered at once
- ⊞ Plans can be altered to see "what if ..." results
- ⊟ The PCW isn't really powerful enough to do it justice; it certainly needs a PCW8512
- ⊟ Screen graphics are very weak; you can't get a graphical overview of the whole network
- ⊟ It doesn't have simple default settings for a rough-and-ready plan

Rotate
£24.95 • Proteus Computing/Trinity Business Systems

Rotate is a simple utility program to print out text files rotated through 90 degrees on the paper. This gives you more columns per page which will be needed for some programs, like large spreadsheets.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Simple menu-driven program does just what it says
- ⊞ Choice of four print fonts, which can be used to print unrotated files too
- ⊟ The quality is nothing like NLQ (e.g. the ordinary "high quality" print option)
- ⊟ Only prints plain text, no subscripts, underlining etc.
- ⊟ No specific support for non-Amstrad printers

Landscape
£19.95 • Systembuild

This is a utility to print out ASCII files rotated on the printer page, so as to make full use of the extra page width. It provides page dimensions of up to 255x96 characters, in a fairly condensed typeface. Runs as a BASIC program.

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AMSTRAD CPC6128/PCW 8256/ PCW 8512 SOFTWARE

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PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Readable, condensed draft quality typeface
- ⊞ Simple and effective to use
- ⊟ It's an undesirable hassle to have to run it from BASIC
- ⊟ It's simple, but really needs more than its 200 words of documentation.
- ⊟ No choice of fonts or text quality.

Disc Mate
£24.99 • Siren Software

Disc Mate is a set of CP/M utility programs which bring complex disc recovery operations within the scope of CP/M novices. Facilities include recovering erased files and making files "read only" (i.e. unerasable).

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Simple on-screen instructions once you've got started
- ⊞ Allows easy recovery of accidentally erased files
- ⊞ "ZIPDISC" program speeds up disc access by 10 to 20%
- ⊞ Friendly file copying program in case you find CP/M's PIP incomprehensible
- ⊟ Disc editor will not recognise double density discs
- ⊟ The instruction sheet is very brief, so you'll need to understand CP/M basics

Oxstat
£113.85 • Medstat Ltd.

This is a specialised statistical analysis package for the PCW. Functions from calculations of means to multiple linear regression are covered, and it can do some rudimentary graphics for results. For about £100 more, extra modules can be bought to allow you to read data from spreadsheets or external devices.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Comprehensive range of statistical functions implemented
- ⊞ Good screen editing facilities for entry of data
- ⊞ The speed seems acceptable, even though it is written in BASIC
- ⊞ Even complex analyses are easily entered by simple menus
- ⊟ You cannot read data from ordinary text files (without paying a lot extra)
- ⊟ Weak on graphical presentation of results
- ⊟ Not very error proof — disc faults cause complete crashes

DATABASES

There are broadly two different types of database, and which suits you best depends, of course, on what you want it for.

Firstly there's the simple card index substitute. For many home users, this will be the kind of thing you want – all it does is store your address book or stock items so that you can easily look them up.

A more sophisticated option is the programmable database. With these, in addition to allowing simple card index retrieval there is a command language which allows you to analyse the data on the cards. For example, you could automatically add up the money owed to you by all your customers from Yorkshire. To make best use of this kind of facility, you will need to be able to understand a little programming, although it's not too hard really.

A bit of jargon now. A database is said to consist of *records* – this is just like a card in a conventional card file, with all someone's details on it. Each record is composed of *fields* – a field is a single entry on a card, like someone's name, or age, or postcode.

The thing that makes a database special is an *index*. You might be able to hold your address book as a simple list in a word processor document, but if it gets large then this becomes unwieldy. An index means that the database has worked out which order records should be in, so it can go straight to the one you want without looking at lots of others first.

The field that you use as your index (e.g. someone's surname) is said to be a *key field*, and can be looked up very fast compared to "non-key" fields. A good database will allow *multiple keys*, meaning that it can look up data just as fast for a variety of types of information.

dBase II
£119.00 • Ashton Tate/First Software

RAW BUT POWERFUL!

The WordStar of database packages. Recently licensed "cheaply" for Amstrad machines, dBase II is a market leader in business computing. As you would expect, this means it is very powerful but very complex. It has a procedure language to allow you to write programs to manipulate the data, and you can construct index files for really fast access to large databases. If you can make the effort to learn it, it'll serve you well.

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Punch WEEKLY 65p
March 28, 1984

"...What you all need is BrainStorm, a remarkably intelligent notion from Caxton Software...The principle behind the program is so obvious that one wonders why it hasn't been thought of before. It is this: when you start thinking about something which is eventually going to be structured and ordered, you initially think in random jumps. Unconnected ideas flash into the brain...

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BrainStorm answers all these questions with great simplicity. Essentially it is a *list organiser.* You start with a more-or-less blank screen. You can either plan your main headings now, or start entering jottings at random. Most people go for a half-way house; perhaps you can put down "Beginning, Middle, End", as your three headings. Then start putting down your ideas. Pretty soon BrainStorm will follow your thoughts and start making interconnections on the basis of word-matches...

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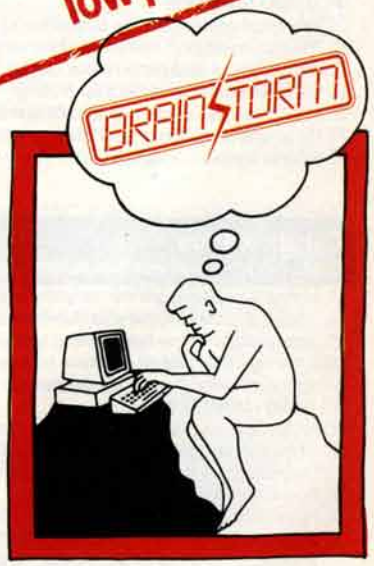

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THE GOOD SOFTWARE FILE

DATABASES

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Powerful command language for customised programs
⊞ Indexing facility makes large databases fast to handle
⊞ Can handle very big databases
⊞ The data can be fairly easily altered after its entry
⊟ Manual is daunting (but there are plenty of independent books on the market)
⊟ Can't easily alter the screen record layout
⊟ For an expensive package, you still only get 32 fields per record
⊟ Generally unfriendly unless you have some programming skills

Condor 1
£99.99 • Caxton Software Ltd.

Condor is firmly pitched at the dBase II market. Like dBase, it is not only a filing system but also a programming language that allows command procedures for complex data operations. It can handle very big records — 127 fields — handy for some things like questionnaire processing. The user interface is slightly ragged, and it lacks dBase's ability to index files for fast access.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Very flexible record structuring and searching
⊞ Better control than dBase over the screen format
⊞ Command language for creating data processing programs
⊞ Can handle big databases — up to 127 fields per record
⊞ The manual is large, well written and understandable
⊟ No provision for fast data access by indexes
⊟ The on-screen prompting information is weak

Flexifile (including Flexiwrite)
£49.95 • Saxon/NewStar

GOOD VALUE!

(Also marketed by Amsoft as Microfile/Microwrite)
Flexifile is a well implemented simple database, driven by plenty of menus and on-screen prompts. This is a good thing, since you certainly couldn't learn to use it by reading the manual. It's fast and has good screen control, although it has some size restrictions. Flexifile comes with a "free" word processor, Flexiwrite, which is adequate.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ The price includes a competent word processor, which can run mail merging from Flexifile
⊞ Plenty of menus and on-screen prompting
⊞ Very flexible formatting for screen layout and printing
⊞ Numeric fields can be expressions to be calculated
⊞ Indexing is fast and can be on several fields
⊟ Maximum number of fields per record is only 20
⊟ The manual is badly organised and generally too brief
⊟ Limited facilities for totalling up fields in a database

Cardbox
£59.99 • Caxton Software Limited

GOOD VALUE!

As the name suggests, this database sets out to be a straight replacement for a conventional card index system. It doesn't provide any facilities for totalling up fields in different records, but does allow very flexible ways of searching records. Very flexible screen layout, set up by a screen editor. The best value for money of the card index systems.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Very good control over the screen layout of each record (or "card")
⊞ The documentation makes Cardbox very simple to use
⊞ Wide range of data patterns that can be searched for
⊞ Good control of form layout for printing
⊞ Elaborate indexes can provide efficient access to data
⊟ No control language or field totalling facility
⊟ Slow to access unindexed data

Cardbox-Plus
£134.00+VAT • Business Simulations Ltd.

Business Simulations are the company who actually wrote the successful Cardbox database, and they are the sole distributors of their enhanced version Cardbox-Plus. Disappointingly, still no field totalling facilities, but it does boast sorting, index listing, disc management and an autosave feature as extras to Cardbox. The ultimate straight card index, if you have the money.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ All the facilities of the very successful Cardbox
⊞ Cards can be sorted into order for browsing
⊞ "Autosave" will regularly store the data to disc in case of mishap
⊞ Files created by Cardbox can be read
⊞ Full and good manual, although the tutorial is at the end
⊟ Still no way of performing numeric calculations
⊟ A lot to pay for a few frills to the basic Cardbox

First Base
£29.95 • Minerva

Billed as a simple database for the first time user, First Base is quite a competent cheap card index. However, the manual is rather unreadable, and sometimes inaccurate. It claims to have a "LocoScript mailmerger", but it isn't a good one. Consequently, getting printed output is a weakness.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Can alter the index field at any time
⊞ Simple to use screen editing make data entry easy
⊞ Good value as a simple card index lookup system
⊟ Manual is badly laid out and generally difficult
⊟ The promised LocoScript mailmerger is weak
⊟ Producing printed output is awkward

Cambase
£49.95 • Camsoft

Cambase is very strong on data security - you can define passwords to protect sensitive databases. It is driven by quite an intricate set of menus, and you'll have to plan your application carefully since the database format can't be changed once set up. Generally good for writing applications with.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Sensitive data can be protected by a password system.
⊞ Record structure can be conditional - e.g. "only have a 'spouse' field if status is 'married'"
⊞ "Processes" provide for some simple automatic calcuations
⊟ Over-protective user interface, which asks for confirmation of almost every command
⊟ Database main attributes are fixed after initialisation and can't be changed.
⊟ Poor screen editing of data records
⊟ Manual needs an index, and is weak on explaining advanced topics
⊟ The (single) key field has to be entered separately to the record data proper

Delta
£99.99 • Comshare/NewStar

POWERFUL!

Delta is another of the heavyweights, like dBase II and Condor, but unlike them is fully menu driven. Although the screen layouts are fully flexible, there is a default "quick" layout so you don't have to sweat at defining your own. It could use better record indexing facilities. Particularly good for writing applications, once you have ploughed through the large manual.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Records can contain up to 90 fields, plus groups of fields that may be repeated
⊞ Screen layout can be user defined, or "quick" mode used
⊞ Single-page letter writer provides detailed mail-merge
⊞ Processes can be defined, and run from user defined menus, for ease of use by others
⊞ Very full, and quite readable, manual
⊟ Only one field may be used for indexing
⊟ Very big program - a PCW8256 would be hard pushed
⊟ Some of the menu operations are unforgiving to errors

Easylabel
£23.95 • Multilink Network Systems.

A quick and simple program for setting up a mailing list and printing out selected groups onto label stationery. It is pleasantly simple to use, but frankly spoiled by not having enough room for long addresses — only 4 lines of 25 characters each.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Simple menu driven operation
⊞ Label print runs can be easily restarted after power failure or paper jam
⊞ Addresses can be assigned up to 5 numeric codes, for sophisticated selection
⊟ Space for addresses is only 4 lines of 25 characters
⊟ The brief documentation needs some examples and screen shots
⊟ Numeric selection codes are only 4 digits — not enough for, e.g., the MD's salary.

Magic Filer
£69.95 • Sagesoft

Magic Filer is not a true database, but is a structured filing system. Information is split into a hierarchy of categories, and tagged with a keyword which is not stored as part of the data. You can browse through the data, but it will get tedious if you find it needs updating regularly. Many applications will find Magic Filer restrictive.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Good for browsing through data when you don't really know what's there
⊞ Data can be declared "read only" to protect it from alteration by other browsers
⊟ The basic filing system is weird but not wonderful
⊟ Editing data once in Magic Filer is awkward
⊟ The documentation is far too brief
⊟ You can only have one database per disc

Matchbox
£29.95 • Quest International Computers Ltd.

A cheap, no-frills card index type database. The manual is only 13 pages long, so you had better know yow to use a database before you buy this. You can't customise screen layouts, but you can print labels. Would suit a simple booklist or address list, if you really can't afford better.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Clear on-screen menus guide you through the program
⊞ Can search for fragments of words in a record
⊟ No control over screen layout
⊟ Skimpy manual (13 pages) has almost no examples
⊟ All characters have to be upper case
⊟ Only a single index field is allowed
⊟ If you type fast, you will lose characters

Datafile One
£30.00 • Datarun.

This database is both a low cost card index system and a mail merge utility specifically designed to work with LocoScript. As a card index, it's quite good for personal use, and the mail merge is simple but effective. Good value for money. The documentation is in the form of a database on the delivery disc.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Data can be range checked as it is entered
⊞ Complex masks can be used for searching the database
⊞ Quite fast record access for a low cost package
⊞ Report section (the mail merge) uses LocoScript documents for templates
⊞ LocoScript text styles (bold, italic, etc.) can be used
⊟ The screen editor for designing layouts is a bit too simple to be effective
⊟ No conditional processing in the mail merge section
⊟ The on-line documentation is a nice idea, but cumbersome in practice. Needs a proper manual.

AtLast1
£49.95 • Rational Solutions/NewStar

AtLast is a fairly simple card box type database. It's totally driven by menus and on-screen prompts, but this shouldn't be an excuse for the frankly inadequate manual. Its files are Pascal-compatible, so could be used for complex custom-written applications. AtLast is adequate, but unless money is a real problem, Cardbox does it better.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Data is accessible by Pascal programs, for really esoteric applications
⊞ Up to 5 separate indexes can be used to search the database
⊞ Can read data from word-processed text files
⊟ The manual is far too brief
⊟ Doesn't use screen editing very well in some functions
⊟ Some menu choices are unclear, and recovery if you go wrong is hard
⊟ No built-in facilities for totalling up records

Data Gem
£30.95 • Gemini

A simple database that offers data storage and retrieval operations. Data Gem runs as a set of BASIC files, and so is rather slow. You can speed it up by using index files, but this is fiddly. It's power will be found wanting if you are storing anything more than your birthday reminder list.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Adequate performance on simple files
⊞ The manual has a good introduction on explaining database jargon
⊞ Numeric fields can be calculations, like in spreadsheets
⊟ Not powerful enough for complex searches or lots of data
⊟ Cumbersome to use for anything other than a simple lookup on a single field
⊟ Index files are expensive on disc space

Sage Database
£69.99 • Sagesoft

A basically competent card index with simple calculation abilities that is spoiled by some silly restrictions. There isn't much control over screen layout, which makes listings untidy. Indexing is very primitive, and effectively each record must have a reference number — you can't index on someone's name for example.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Numeric fields may be calculated from expressions
⊞ Data files may have write-protection and a password
⊞ Text editor and mail merger are included
⊞ Manual is simple but effective
⊟ The (single) index field must be a number
⊟ Setting up the database is very long-winded; it needs better screen editing and copying facilities
⊟ Not much screen layout control when listing the data
⊟ Label/form printing has to be done through the mail merger

SIREN SOFTWARE

PCW
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THE GOOD SOFTWARE FILE

DATABASES SPREADSHEETS EDUCATIONAL

Pocket InfoStar
£69.50 • Davis Rubin Associates

Consists of two large programs, DataStar and ReportStar (both available independently). DataStar is a conventional database, with screen card layout and indexing. ReportStar then generates the printed output, either from DataStar or CalcStar files. Powerful if you can use them, but the suite is horrifically overcomplicated, and the documentation just incomprehensible.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ DataStar is a quite good database with indexing and calculated fields.
- ⊞ "Transaction processing" feature allows cross-referencing of data files.
- ⊞ Can be integrated with other Pocket products, eg WordStar.
- ⊟ Two-volume manual set is very badly organised.
- ⊟ There are separate programs to run for form design, data entry and reporting.
- ⊟ Operation is all by obscure command keys, à la WordStar.

SPREADSHEETS

If a database replaces an address book, then a spreadsheet replaces the back of an old envelope. It is really an electronic piece of paper which allows you to jot down numbers, juggle them around and analyse the cost benefits of a situation. Vital for businesses, spreadsheets can be useful to home users too: if you want a bank loan you will find that showing your bank manager a spreadsheet printout of your living expenses answers a lot of questions!

A typical spreadsheet has a grid of rows and columns. This grid forms a screenful of *cells* identified by their column and row numbers, e.g. A3, K36 etc. Each cell can contain a simple number, some text to make the page easier to read, or a *formula* telling the spreadsheet to work out a number from elsewhere. The power of spreadsheets is in this last category, formulae. You can make a cell's value depend on the value of cells above it, or to the left of it, and then this value is automatically updated if you make any changes in the other cells.

So how do you choose between the various spreadsheets? One difference is sheet size, i.e. the number of cells you are allowed to work with. You'll need a few hundred for home use, and 1000 or more for business use. Another area is the range of formulae that you can use – all spreadsheets allow simple column and row totalling, but with some you can get complex statistical analyses too. As with all software, think very carefully what you will need before choosing.

SuperCalc 2
£49.95 • Amsoft/Sorcim — GOOD VALUE!

SuperCalc 2 is broadly similar to ScratchPad Plus , and at least as effective, but it has a smaller workspace and is less flexible about the allowed spreadsheet dimensions. The manual is sensibly separated into a beginners guide, a tutorial and a reference section. One big bonus is that you can store sequences of commands in files for repetitive calculations.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Excellent manual + specific sections for beginners and experts.
- ⊞ Sequences of commands can be stored and later run from files
- ⊞ "Data Interchanger" allows you to transfer spreadsheet data to other applications
- ⊞ Comprehensive range of calculation functions available
- ⊞ Screen can be split into 2 windows
- ⊟ Spreadsheet is limited by memory size
- ⊟ On-screen prompts not as helpful as they might be.

ScratchPad Plus
£59.99 • Caxton Software — GOOD VALUE!

If you want a traditional spreadsheet, ScratchPad Plus has most of the features you could want and more. Using "virtual memory" means you can have a huge data area, and the screen can be divided into windows to view different parts at the same time. Many of the commands bear a remarkable similarity to the big business spreadsheet Lotus 1-2-3 .

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Virtual memory means you can have large spreadsheets
- ⊞ Multiple windows mean you can see all the parts you want at once
- ⊞ Good control over formatting
- ⊞ Vast range of calculations possible
- ⊟ Documentation sorely needs an index
- ⊟ Screen prompts are cryptic; you need the manual to hand
- ⊟ No provision for automatic execution from files

Multiplan
£69.99 • MicroSoft/NewStar

A well established package with all the features you would expect of a reasonable spreadsheet — it just lacks that something extra that recommends some of the newer ones. No support for command reading from files, or for "virtual memory". Adequate, but there are better for the money. And the manual can kill at twenty paces!

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Functions easily entered by menu selection
- ⊞ Full range of features and functions
- ⊞ On-screen help text is available as you go
- ⊞ Sheets can be interlinked and data transferred between them
- ⊟ You need a computer science degree to understand the manual
- ⊟ No support for automatic execution
- ⊟ Workspace is limited by CP/M memory space
- ⊟ Printer output a bit cumbersome

The Cracker
£49.00 • Software Technology/Newstar — BOFFINS' BEST BUY!

A spreadsheet designed with advanced calculating power firmly in mind, including statistical functions. The screen layout is totally defined by the user, and cell value calculations can almost be full programs, e.g DO ... WHILE. It might prove too complex if all you want is simple spreadsheet operations. The screen messages are very helpful though.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Can cope with very complex formulae
- ⊞ Flexible screen format defined by the user
- ⊞ On-screen prompts are very clear
- ⊞ Documentation is big with plenty of examples and a good reference section
- ⊞ Graphs/charts can be automatically produced
- ⊟ You've got to do a lot of work just to get started
- ⊟ Very complex for quick, simple applications
- ⊟ Needs some programming skills to get the most out of it
- ⊟ Spreadsheet space is on the small side (17K) although memory is used efficiently

Pocket CalcStar
£39.95 • Davis Rubin Associates

A fairly traditional spreadsheet but with a few surpising features. It's not particularly large or fast, but is attractively priced and has all the basic functions. Can form part of an integrated system with the other Pocket products. A safe buy for the first- time user, and the documentation is up to the usual high MicroPro standards.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Good range of mathematical calculation functions.
- ⊞ Good documentation – sections for beginners and reference.
- ⊞ You can preset a course of cells to visit, for form filling.
- ⊞ Can be integrated with other Pocket products, eg ReportStar
- ⊟ Screen size is very small – at most 15 spreadsheet rows, and normally only 10.
- ⊟ No auto-recalculate facility
- ⊟ It's not very fast
- ⊟ You can't type heading text etc. over adjacent columns

PlannerCalc
£39.00 • Comshare/NewStar

PlannerCalc does for spreadsheets what Cobol does for programming languages. It is verbose and inflexible to use, but this does make you think very carefully about your application before entering data. Commands are all entered by pseudo-English phrases, rather than terse abbreviations. All work is done on a command line, not by moving the cursor around the screen.

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ English-style commands are understandable by non-experts
- ⊞ On-screen help available at any point
- ⊞ Documentation is fairly well indexed
- ⊟ Verbose commands are awkward to type in
- ⊟ Editing and inserting data is restricted
- ⊟ Grouping cells into ranges for copying etc. is difficult
- ⊟ Control of sheet printouts is limited

MasterPlanner
£69.95 • Comshare/NewStar

MasterPlanner is essentially a souped up version of PlannerCalc. For double the money, what you get is a slicker manual, better formatting options, a bigger workspace and the same basic inflexibility. Files from PlannerCalc can be used with MasterPlanner .

PLUSES • MINUSES
- ⊞ Same pluses as PlannerCalc
- ⊞ Spreadsheet stored in virtual memory, i.e. can be as big as your disk
- ⊞ Can read files from PlannerCalc
- ⊟ Same minuses as PlannerCalc
- ⊟ Apart from size and speed, no real extra power over PlannerCalc

EDUCATIONAL

Typing Tutor
£24.95 • Computer One.

BEGINNERS' BEST BUY!

A superior typing tutor which makes very good use of the PCW screen and graphics facilities. Traditional typing exercises starting from basics are covered in full, and if they get too boring then there is an addictive "Hangman" game. Recommended.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Good use of graphics to make typing interesting
⊞ All the traditional typing exercises covered fully
⊞ All instructions appear on the screen as you go
⊞ Robust user interface makes it easy to use
⊞ Addictive "Hangman" game gives fruitful light relief
⊟ No way of cutting longwinded text when you get used to it.

Iankey Crash Course
£24.95 • Iansyst

A fairly traditional typing tutor, taking you through basic keyboard exercises. There's a lot of explanatory text, which gets in the way second time around. Definitely competent, but a bit boring.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Mostly avoids boring letter drills
⊞ Very full on-screen information guides you along
⊞ "Fast" option cuts out some text if it gets repetitive
⊟ Unimaginative use of graphics, compared to Computer One 's tutor.
⊟ It doesn't always ensure that the cursor is properly aligned with the exercise text

Iankey Two Fingers to touch typing course
£24.95 • Iansyst

IMPROVERS' BEST BUY!

A useful typing tutor in that it specifically caters for people who already can get by on keyboards with two fingers. You are gradually introduced to touch typing, so your speed doesn't drop while you learn. Fills a necessary slot in the Typing Tutor market.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Suitable for improving two-finger typists without much drop in speed
⊞ Full on-screen instructions
⊞ Exercise text is interesting paragraphs, not letter drills
⊟ Explanation text is annoyingly verbose in some lessons
⊟ It doesn't always ensure that the cursor is properly aligned with the exercise text

Touch 'n' Go
£24.95 • Caxton Software

A very traditional typing tutor, with no attempt at interesting screen presentation. Letter drills are rigorously pursued, making for good typing practice if you can stick to it. Also has number keypad tuition for data entry operations.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Methodical letter drills enforce good practice.
⊞ Provides number keypad tuition as well as letters.
⊞ Instruction screens are optional, so can be cut out for speed.
⊟ Gives a flattering error rate, since it allows you unlimited use of the delete key.
⊟ Doesn't tell you how to make the number keypad actually work on the PCW!
⊟ Boring use of the screen. You need to really want to learn.

Better Spelling
£12.95 • School Software Ltd.

This is a spelling course aimed at the 8 to adult age group. It consists of a series of well organised, short lessons each dealing with one topic, like plurals or which version of there/their/they're to use in a sentence. The use of the PCW screen is rather unimaginative, and doesn't hold your attention.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Well thought out lessons to emphasise particular points
⊞ Teaches words in a sentence context as well as in isolation
⊞ Lessons can be picked in any order from a menu
⊞ Seems to be proof against mischievous key pressing
⊟ Boring use of the screen doesn't grab interest
⊟ No instructions come as to how to use the program.

Advantage

DISC SOFTWARE FOR ALL PCW AND CPC COMPUTERS

THE COMPLEAT CP/M UTILITIES SUITE • £11.95 (Members £9.95)

Contains Full Screen Text Editor - 20 function File Manager (one key erase, rename, copy, hide, squeeze, unsqueeze, print etc) - Disc Sector Editor - Catalogue and Unerase erased programs, (CPC) - Z80 Assembler, Reverse Assembler, Linker, Library, Z80 Debugger - File Scanner, Editor, Compare, Chopper - String Search - Bad Sector Eliminator - Typewriter Emulator - plus improved versions of PIP, DDT, LOAD, SUBMIT, DIR, DUMP and TYPE.

LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT • £9.95 PER DISC (Members: £7.95)

CP/M GAMES COMPENDIUM. Includes the famouse Colossal Cave adventure with game-save feature - Chess Challenge - Othello - Golf Simulator - Mastermind - Life - Rubik's Cube - Noughts & Crosses - Pressup - Awari - Ping-Pong - Word-Search Puzzle Maker - Biorhythm Calculator - Calendar Generator - Maze Designer - Gothic and Banner poster printers.

AMUSEMENTS AND DIVERSIONS. Includes the classic Star-Trek - Star Trader - Lunar Lander - Hunt - Blackjack - Chase - Boggle - Baseball - Civil War - Craps - Bee Attack - Baccarat - Square - Quest (a text adventure) - Calculator - Loan Estimator - Weather Forecaster - Horoscope - Home Budget - Investment Evaluator - Poster and Label printers.

"C" PACKAGE • £13.95 (Members £11.95) • Needs 128k RAM and CP/M Plus

The disc is full of files and programs to help both the novice and experienced programmer write and compile C language programs. Includes Powerful Compiler - Full Screen Program Editor - Worked Examples - Utility and Game in C - 27k of on-screen Documentation - Compiler Source - User Support.

APPLICATION PROGRAMS • £11.95 (Members £9.95)

Programs include Inventory Manager/Database - Full Screen /Text Editor - Word Count - Spelling Checker with easy to edit Starter Dictionary - Alphabetical Sort - Library Utility for organising and cataloguing files (four programs) - Keyboard Definer (CPC) - Synonym - Password - Scrambler - Unspooler for continuing work while printing - Squeeze/Unsqueeze for saving up to 40% disc space - Help Organiser - Sorted Directory with file size and space remaining.

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL USER GROUP

Join the leading independent user group, supporting the Amstrad range of computers, and receive monthly Newsletters, user-support, the opportunity to share views, programs and ideas, plus £2 off each of the discs above. The membership fee is £8.95 per year (UK) or £13.95 (Overseas).

ADVANTAGE (Dept 8000) • 33 MALYNS CLOSE • CHINNOR • OXFORDSHIRE • OX9 4EW

Our discs run on PCW & CPC computers and contain comprehensive documentation files. Some software is public domain, supplied free of charge. Upgrade earlier versions by returning original with £1.95.

NOTE: PRICES INCLUDE P &P AND VAT AT 15% • OVERSEAS ORDERS, PLEASE ADD £1 PER DISC

THE GOOD SOFTWARE FILE

GAMES GRAPHICS

GAMES

Batman
£14.95 • Ocean Software — *GREAT FUN!*

If you think the PCW screen is for text only, this game will make your jaw drop. Its animated 3D graphics are remarkable. The game too is surprisingly sophisticated. Despite the title, there's no fighting involved, just a good deal of brainwork and agile key control. While exploring the vast underground complex you have to negotiate a wide range of hazards and solve brain-twisting puzzles, often to do with manipulating obstacles and turning them to your advantage.. Superb entertainment – there's even a Batman 'tune'!

⊞ State-of-the-art 3D graphics.
⊞ You have the ability to push objects around a location offering scope for ingenious puzzles.
⊞ Conveyor belts, electrified floors and various creatures pose a severe challenge.
⊞ There's enormous variety and depth to the game. You won't get bored...
⊟ ...until you've finally solved it.

Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy
£28.70 • Infocom/Softsel — *HILARIOUS! SUPERB!*

In many people's view the best adventure program ever written. Based on the original book/radio show/TV program, it puts you in the same wacky situations forcing you to solve problems of mind-boggling improbability. The program is text only, but sophisticated enough to convince you that Douglas Adams himself is hiding inside your Amstrad.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Guaranteed more laughs than any other program.
⊞ Solving some of the problems will have you gasping with glee.
⊞ Responses to your commands are almost always intelligent – and witty.
⊞ A very large program – many hours of challenge.
⊞ Better entertainment than the original radio show.
⊟ Liable to keep you from doing other things!

Infocom games
£28.70 or £22.95 • Infocom/Softsel — *CHALLENGING!*

Virtually the whole range of Infocom's famous text adventures are now available for the PCWs. From the original Zork series, now several years old, through to modern titles such as Spellbreaker, the programs all offer sophisticated, challenging entertainment of the highest order. If you're new to adventuring you should start with an 'introductory level' program such as Wishbringer. Old hands can tackle an 'expert level' title such as Starcross, Suspended or Spellbreaker.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Renowned for their sophistication in handling and responding to your typed commands.
⊞ Superb text descriptions give each game special atmosphere.
⊞ Great satisfaction to be had in overcoming numerous problems and deadends.
⊞ Lack of graphics means you can fool a casual observer into thinking you're word-processing!
⊟ They're not cheap.

Invaders
£19.95 (or free with InterGem disc interface) • Gemini

Are you an ageing hippy who toyed briefly with the original Space Invaders when video games first appeared (and then gave up playing because you were no good)? Then this is for you, it's pure nostalgia — simple space invaders. Go on, zap those database blues away.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Simple enough even for managers to play
⊞ Oozes nostalgia for all those 10p's you spent in the pub many years ago
⊟ The sound on the PCW really doesn't make any impact
⊟ The screen movements are not very fluid — firing on the move is erratic.
⊟ Games have moved on a long way since it was designed
⊟ £19.95 is a ridiculously high price

Graham Gooch's Test Cricket
£19.95 • Audiogenic

This is a fully animated game, allowing either 1 or 2 players to choose teams and compete in limited over or test cricket. You can control where the ball is bowled, and when the batsman strikes it. A good version, if you are a cricket fan.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Surprisingly good animated graphics (in cricket pitch green, of course)
⊞ Comes with up-to-date England and Australia squads preset, or pick your own sides
⊞ You can control the bowler's pace and batsman's timing
⊟ The 1-player game palls after a while — strictly for cricket fans
⊟ The PCW's sound doesn't generate any atmosphere

Colossus Chess 4.0
£15.95 • CDS Software — *STRONGEST PLAY!*

Tests conducted by 8000 PLUS appear to confirm this program's claim to be the strongest of the chess titles in actual play, although only by a small margin. It actually uses the time you're thinking to continue its planning! The program appears to have all conceivable features including such things as simulating "blindfold" games.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Probably the most powerful in play.
⊞ Includes openings library of 3000 moves.
⊞ Numerous features including proper tournament mode and "equality" mode in which the program matches your time.
⊞ Choice of algebraic or cursor key move entry.
⊞ Comes with file of 35 "pre-recorded" games and 19 chess problems.
⊟ Forget the 3D display – the 2D option is much clearer.

Cyrus II Chess
£15.95 • Amsoft — *GREAT GRAPHICS!*

This program's outstanding feature is its highly-detailed 3D display – it's stunning. So is the super-smooth (although slow) movement of the pieces. It has numerous other features, though not quite as many as Colossus. In our tests Colossus seemed to play better, but Cyrus II is still likely to beat you, and if you want a package to impress your friends it's probably the best to go for.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Gorgeous 3D view of board backed up by 2D option.
⊞ Very strong play.
⊞ Numerous frills and features such as the option of taking back a move.
⊞ Easy to use cursor key move entry.
⊟ Usually outplayed by Colossus.
⊟ No option for algebraic move entry.

3D Clock Chess
£15.95 • CP Software

The title refers to the fact that the program's 3D display includes a view of a chess clock complete with buttons and moving hands. A bit of a gimmick, really – both the other programs also keep a check of the time each player takes and include various time control options. The 3D display is prettier than Colossus, but not as nice as Cyrus.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Tough to beat, even at low levels.
⊞ Attractive 3D display.
⊞ Features include the ability to set any time limit per move for the computer.
⊟ Appears not quite as strong in play as Colossus.
⊟ Some features missing – eg. no option to take back a move after a blunder!
⊟ Move entry is only by algebraic coordinates (e.g. e2e4).
⊟ No 2D display option – the 3D can sometimes be confusing.

Bridge Player III
£19.95 • CP Software

Surprisingly, perhaps, good bridge programs appear to be much harder to create than good chess programs. Most suffer from erratic bidding, poor card play and numerous quirks. Bridge Player III can't entirely escape these criticisms, but as bridge programs on micros go, it's good. The human player plays South, with the computer running the other three hands. It claims not to cheat.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ You can play bridge without first finding three like-minded people.
⊞ Program offers reasonably strong card-play.
⊞ You can specify the strength of your hand for bidding practice.
⊞ The computer keeps the score – no messy sheets of paper.
⊟ Bidding with the computer as both partner and opponent can be quriky and frustrating.
⊟ Overall strength of play is well below that of an average player.
⊟ The instruction leaflet could do with much more detail.

GRAPHICS

DR Graph
£49.95 • Digital Research

A rather specialised package, specifically for presenting complex data in graph form. Can produce line graphs, bar charts, piecharts, scatter plots, text, and compositions of any mixture of these. Very flexible, and easily operated by menus, but really needs a graph plotter to do it justice.

PLUSES • MINUSES
⊞ Can read data from certain spreadsheet packages (e.g.SuperCalc)

⊞ Extensive annotation and text placing is possible
⊞ Good, professional manual (although no mention of Amstrad specifics)
⊞ Supports a colour graph plotter as an output device
⊟ You need CP/M expertise to get it installed and going
⊟ There is no way of joining points by a smoothed curve

DR Draw
£49.95 • Digital Research

This is a drawing utility, which allows you to compose designs from circles, polygons, lines and a wide variety of shadings and styles of text. It's very cumbersome to use unless you also havea light pen or a mouse, and overall not very friendly. Not recommended unless you're ready for some hard work.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ When pushed, it can produce very neat diagrams, even on the standard PCW printer
⊞ Good, professional manual (although no mention of Amstrad specifics)
⊟ You need CP/M expertise to get it installed and going
⊟ Painfully slow screen handling
⊟ Difficult to use by keyboard alone -- you must buy a lightpen

Microdraft
£79.99 • Timatic Systems Ltd.

SPECIALIST BEST BUY!

This package is essentially an electronic drafting board. Lines, circles, polygons, text and so on can be accurately placed on a page, and then scaled and rotated en masse. Microdraft is not an art package, so there are no freehand sketching facilities. Overall an excellent package, comprehensively designed and easy to use.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Elements can be positioned very accurately (better than thePCW screen resolution)
⊞ Discrete elements can be grouped into blocks and manipulated
⊞ Well written and comprehensive manual (except it refers to the CPC6128 keyboard)
⊞ "Zoom" feature allows you to work on fine detail
⊞ Supports output on proper graphic plotters
⊟ No "undo" facility
⊟ Hard copy output is very slow

Light Pen & Graphics Package
£79.95 • The Electric Studio

GREAT FUN!

Ostensibly you are buying a piece of hardware — a light pen that can be used with many PCW graphics programs, like DR Draw. In practice, its main use is with the software that comes with it, a very good picture drawing package. You can freehand draw, get airbrush effects, create polygons and circles, and move blocks of pixels. Great fun.

PLUSES • MINUSES

⊞ Light pen hardware is a simple module that slots onto the back of the PCW
⊞ You can draw by freehand pen control or with cursor keys for accuracy
⊞ Menu selections are easy to understand
⊞ Full range of functions for area filling, shading and spraying
⊞ Blocks of pixels can be moved and copied
⊟ You would need to know your way around CP/M to use the lightpen itself with other graphics programs
⊟ Items on the screen are purely pixels, not distinct elements like in DR Draw or Microdraft
⊟ No positioning of items by numeric co-ordinates for accuracy.

NEXT ISSUE

Lack of space prevented us from including two further sections in this issue – Accounts and Communications (although the former is largely dealt with in this month's comparative feature). Both sections will be included in our next issue together with an update of other parts of the File.

In future we shall be dividing it into three parts and publishing them in rotation, one each month (fully updated).

Meanwhile if you are aware of any significant omissions or errors in the File as published, please let us know. We intend to maintain it as THE authoritative guide to PCW software.

RSC Ltd.

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MP MICRO PERIPHERALS 165 ***RSC SUPER DEAL***
(quality matrix printer, tractor and friction, 165 cps, draft mode, 75 cpsNLQ, bi-directional logic seeker, quiet and easy to use. Epson compatible control codes).£239.00
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200 cps at draft, 40 cps at NLQ. 7k memory buffer (128 downloadable characters) tractor and friction.....£PHONE
PANASONIC KX - P1080U
tractor/friction feed, NLQ 20 cps, draft 100 cps, 1k buffer, standard centronic interface.....£189.95
CANON PW - 1080A
tractor/friction feed, NLQ 30 cps, draft 180 cps, 2k buffer *** highly recommended ***.....£269.00
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All the qualities as the NL-10 with a 136 column width and 16k buffer.....£389.00

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COMMUNICATIONS

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RSC SUPER SCOOP.....£199.00

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GRAPHICS

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AMSOFT Microfile/Microword.....£39.95
CAXTON BrainStorm.....£39.95
CAXTON Cardbox.....£78.50
CAXTON Cardbox Plus.....£124.50
CAXTON ScratchPad Plus.....£55.50
CAXTON Touch 'n' Go.....£19.95
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A copy of the best-selling book *Mastering the Amstrad PCW 8256/8512* by John Hughes. It's packed with useful information on LocoScript, CP/M and other topics. Far easier to understand than the manual.

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Two blank single-density 3" discs. So as soon as you receive your program you can immediately make a backup copy and have another disc available for data.

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People in the know reckon you can divide game players into two camps: those who have played *Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy* and those who haven't. If you're in the second camp you haven't lived.

The game is phenomenal, there's no two ways about it. There are no graphics, no chasing around after little green blobs. Just a combination of the brilliant wit and imagination of Douglas Adams with the renowned programming sophistication of Infocom.

All you do is type verbal commands into the computer in response to the events it describes on screen. But after you've been playing for a bit you'll be convinced your machine is alive – the atmosphere it creates is that convincing.

It's the same with all Infocom games. Their depth, power and ingenuity are in a different league to most other adventures.

All the titles comes superbly packaged – for example, *Hitch-hikers* includes a pair of panic glasses and, of all things, a ball of fluff, as well as some very entertaining documentation. The four leading titles have a recommended (and fully justified) shop price of £24.95 plus VAT (that's £28.70). So our offer of them at just £19.95 is an absolute bargain.

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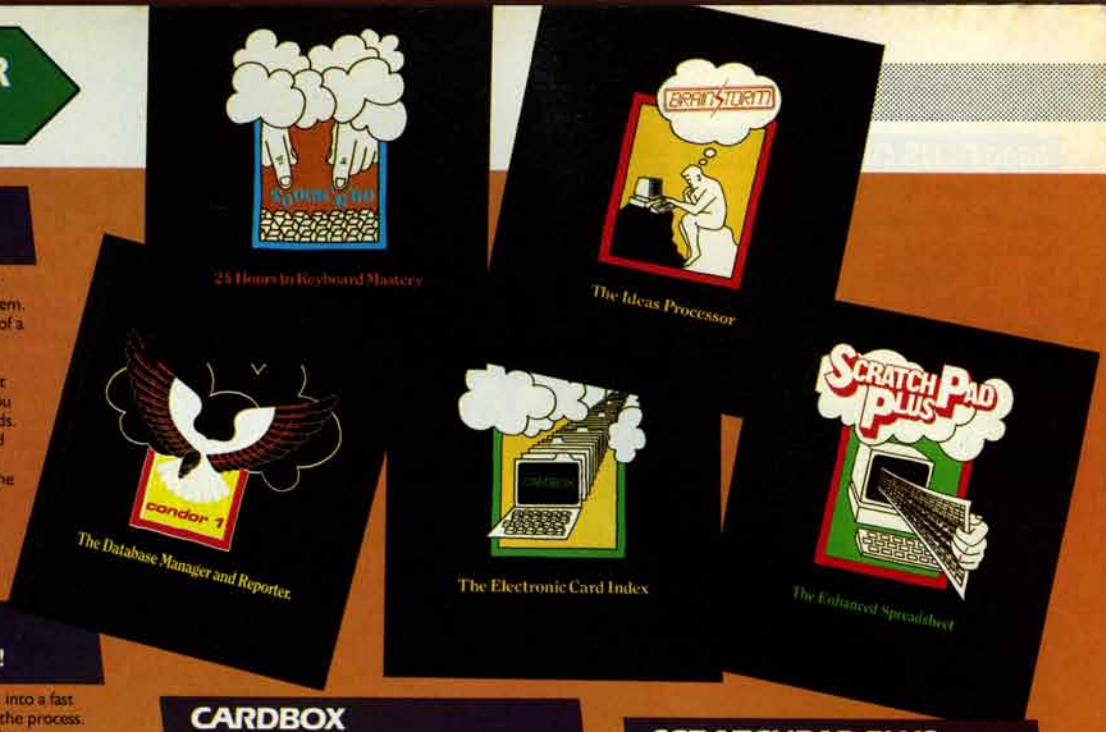

CONDOR 1

Only £87.50 – save over £12!!

This is a heavy-weight piece of software described by Caxton as a database management and reporting system.

In addition to the normal search and sort routines of a database it offers you the ability to manipulate information in powerful ways. For example it can perform automatic calculations on numerical data that you type in. And by using its 35 built in commands you can create a database system tailor-made to your needs.

Condor 1 could be used, for example, to create and print invoices from a file of customers. VAT and the invoice totals could be automatically calculated, and the invoices themselves could be sorted in numerical or alphabetical order.

TOUCH 'n GO

Only £21.95 – save over £3!!

Caxton's typing tutor. Its aim is to turn you into a fast touch typist and to give you a good time in the process.

The program has been used widely on other computers at many times the cost and Caxton believe you can get outstanding results within 24 hours. They also say its fun to use, addictive even. Having seen the response to it of a couple of secretaries here at The Old Barn I think we'd agree.

BRAINSTORM

Only £43.75 – save over £6!!

This is the program which generated an entire new program category – it's an ideas processor.

Its function is to help you organise your thoughts. Say you're planning a complex function, like writing a detective novel or launching a new range of hand-sewn dolls. *Brainstorm* will allow you to link and structure your ideas in an extremely innovative way.

CARDBOX

Only £52.50 – save over £7!!

As its name suggests, this program offers a very slick replacement for card-filing systems.

You can use it to keep track of customer details, lists of products or even a fact-store for your stamp collection.

First you design the layout of your card – there's great flexibility here. Then, once you've entered the information, you can use the system to search very quickly for what you want to know. Unlike a normal card file you could search for any type of information – for example name, address, membership number, nature of enquiry, whatever.

Since the number of cards the program can handle runs into tens of thousands disc space permitting, and since it's fast and flexible, you should find it powerful enough for almost any indexing system.

If you bear in mind that in the summer Caxton were selling the program for £99.99, you can see that this offer is very special indeed.

SCRATCHPAD PLUS

Only £52.50 – save over £7!!

This is a superb spreadsheet program – many would say it's the best available on the PCW machines. Complex calculations ranging from simple financial planning to advanced mathematical analysis can be carried out very quickly. And once your spreadsheet model is created, you can instantly see the result of varying your original figures.

As well as all the usual spreadsheet functions, Scratchpad Plus boasts the ability to handle particularly big files – you're not limited by the working memory, only by the size of your disc.

In addition there's great flexibility over spreadsheet size, and the facility for opening windows on several parts of the spreadsheet simultaneously.

Those features, plus the fact that the spreadsheet is specially customised for the PCW keyboard and offers extensive onscreen help, make it a superb choice.

Any one of these titles for just £19.95 (inc VAT)!

HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

The world's greatest, wittiest, wackiest adventure game. You take on the famous role of Arthur Dent who only stays alive by discovering ingenious solutions to problems such as that posed by the terrifying Bugblatter Beast, a creature so stupid it thinks that if you can't see it, it can't see you.

Can you work out what do with a pile of junk mail? Can you learn to understand Vagan poetry? Can you show an obstinate door a sign of intelligence? A game to delight you for months.

WISHBRINGER

A stunningly atmospheric game in the Infocom fantasy tradition. The game starts with you, the village postman of Festeron, discovering that a cat belonging to the keeper of the Magicke Shoppe has been stolen. Your only help in solving what rapidly becomes a dark mystery is Wishbringer, a small stone bestowing seven special powers.

Although this program is intended to appeal to relatively inexperienced adventurers, it also has masses to offer the expert.

SPELLBREAKER

This is a sequel to Wishbringer and is described by Infocom as "expert level" which for you and me means "nigh impossible"! As well as the challenge of tackling wicked puzzles, you have the potential for casting various spells, a power you'll need if you're to survive.

BALLYHOO

A brilliantly original scenario in this one. It's set in a strange, rather seedy circus where the owner's daughter has been kidnapped. You have to discover whodunnit, a quest that will have you stuck in the lion's cage, trying to climb over the Fat Lady and holding a bizarre conversation with a midget.

Or any of these Infocom titles for just £16.95

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ZORK III
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SORCEROR
STARCROSS
SUSPENDED, PLANETFALL
DEADLINE
SEASTALKER

These programs (all superb!) would normally cost £19.95 + VAT (that's £22.95). By buying them from us you save £6! Just tick the titles you require on the order form.

BATMAN

Only £9.95 – save £5

Holy smoke, this offer is HOT! The best arcade game yet to appear on the PCW machines and you can have it for under a tenner.

Batman is *superb* – the game's challenge, sophistication and sheer high quality belies its comic strip roots. Until you've seen it onscreen you simply won't believe what your PCW is capable of graphically.

The idea is to explore a vast network of rooms in search of various objects required to assemble your Batmobile. But numerous devious puzzles and opponents are put in your way, so much so that you hardly have time to admire the astounding animation and detailed background scenery.

It may not be useful, but it's certainly great fun and a bargain even at the normal asking price.

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There's no catch. We're just eager for you to keep in touch.

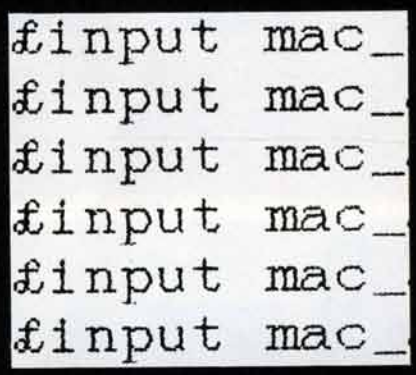
1. NewSpool

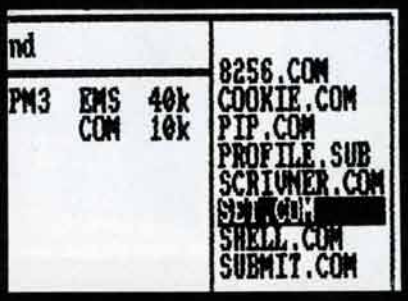
This invaluable utility alone is worth more than the entire cost of your subscription! It normally sells for £19.95. If you run programs from CP/M such as *WordStar*, *NewWord* or *Supercalc 2*, NewSpool will allow you to keep working at the keyboard at the same time as a file is being printed out.

You can queue print several jobs, and NewSpool will continue printing them even when you've exited the CP/M program. Could literally save you hours.

2. Scrivener

A massively powerful and original program created by programming talent Andrew Clarke. It offers an ingenious way of processing text files doing such things as carrying out calculations on figures. You can use it for some tasks a spreadsheet would do, but also for some a spreadsheet couldn't handle. Documents like delivery notes, statements, invoices and form letters can be generated with calculations automatically looked after. Andrew Clarke has decided against releasing the program commercially, and the 60 or so pages of documentation for the program are therefore provided on a file which you can print out. If you're willing to spend some time getting to know the program you could find it immensely valuable.





3. Shell

If you find yourself daunted by CP/M, *Shell* could be the program you need. It transforms CP/M's onscreen presentation, making it far easier to select commands and to see what options are available to you.

Basically it offers the range of commands via menus, so that instead of typing in a command you select it using the cursor keys – much as in LocoScript.

Very slick, and especially useful if you want CP/M programs to be run by someone who isn't very familiar with computers.

4. Cracker 2 demo

Cracker 2 is a power spreadsheet costing £49. That's a fair bit to spend if you're not sure whether it will do what you want from a spreadsheet. This demo program is your answer. It actually offers ALL of Cracker 2's facilities, with the one limitation that spreadsheets you can build up can be no bigger than 3K.

So you'll be able to check out one of the most powerful programs on the PCW market at your leisure. A great opportunity both for someone considering buying Cracker and for someone who just wants to learn more about spreadsheets.

ACCESS / VISA HOTLINE
If you prefer to telephone your order, just dial 0458 74011 and ask for credit card orders.

PLUS...GAMES!

To round off the disc you'll find a couple of games from the public domain. Not blockbusters you'd pay a fortune for, but fun nonetheless.

TIP-OFFS

The pages which give you the lowdown on Locoscript, CP/M, life, the universe and avoiding the PCW hair-tear syndrome.

Control and Escape

Some of the key labels on the PCW keyboard are not conventional. If you buy some software, you might be frustrated by not being able to find the keys it refers to as "CONTROL" and "ESCAPE" or ("CTRL" and "ESC"). On the PCW, you will find that the "CONTROL" key is labelled "ALT", and the "ESCAPE" key is usually labelled "EXIT", or sometimes "STOP" – it varies between software packages.

The 8512 second disc

If you've invested in a PCW8512, or bought a second disc drive for the 8256, then you might get caught out if you haven't realised that there are crucial differences between the two disc drives on the PCW.

Discs on the single density drive (drive A) have two sides; each side has to be formatted separately, and can be write protected separately. On the double density drive (drive B), which has twin disc heads, the PCW uses both sides of the disc at once. Formatting the disc formats *both* sides, and the disc can only be used one way around in the drive (the way that it was when you formatted it). So don't try to format side 2 of a double density disc, thinking you can store more files there, because you will only erase everything that is on side 1!

Copying to printer

Apart from simply printing out a copy of a file that you have on disc, the printer can also be made to echo everything that is written to the screen while you're in CP/M. To do this, type **[ALT]+P** at any time; the PCW will beep once, and then the printer will reproduce all subsequent text that goes onto the screen. Typing **[ALT]+P** again turns off the printer (but won't beep at you).

This can be really useful – for example, you can store with each disc a paper copy of its directory. Type **DIR [ALT]+P [RETURN]**, and the directory will appear on the printer. When the printer stops, type **[ALT]+P** again. Or, you can print a copy of the output from a program to use as instructions for someone else; type **[ALT]+P** before you run it, and again after it has fininshed.

This only works for simple text printing – the printer won't copy any fancy screen graphics. But don't forget you can get a full screen dump by pressing [EXTRA]+[PTR].

"JUST WHO IS THIS JOYCE YOU KEEP MUTTERING ABOUT?"

Caps lock key

The SHIFT LOCK key on the PCW does not work quite in the conventional way. Most computers have a CAPS LOCK key which puts all letters into upper case, but leaves the number keys unshifted, unlike SHIFT LOCK which alters both.

CAPS LOCK is normally a good deal more useful – it would allow you to type **PCW 8256** instead of **PCW *"%'**.

But all is not lost; buried in the depths of the PCW manual there is a way of getting CAPS LOCK: just press **[ALT]+[ENTER]**. The same combination again releases CAPS LOCK mode.

The Unit key

There is a little mentioned facility in LocoScript, hinted at by the mysterious presence of a key marked "UNIT". The "Set" menu also has an unit option. Units are a way of storing place markers in LocoScript text, so you can easily move around.

Suppose you are writing an instruction manual, with a summary section. Every time you write an instruction, you want to update the summary section too. At the place where you are inserting an instruction section, set a unit mark (type **[+]UT**), and also set one in the summary section. Now pressing **[UNIT]** while in the instruction section will take you straight to the summary section, and then **[ALT]+[UNIT]** takes you straight back. You can set any number of unit marks – each press of **[UNIT]** takes you to the next (or last) mark.

Screen printout

It's often handy to be print out an exact copy of the screen on the printer. If you have lots of discs, maybe you could keep with each one a copy of the LocoScript main menu screen showing all the document names so that you know what's on it.

To get a "screen dump" like this at any time, whether you're in LocoScript, CP/M or an application program, just press **[EXTRA]+[PTR]**

WARNING!! *If you are still using LocoScript version 1 (supplied with early PCW 8256's), then doing a screen dump while editing a file in LocoScript will work fine, but will crash the machine afterwards. Send off your version 1 to Amstrad and get your free LocoScript update now! (The version number is displayed on the initial title screen.)*

KEY CONVENTIONS

On these tips pages and throughout the magazine we've used the following conventions in explaining keyboard commands.

1. All commands which you are to type on the keyboard are printed in bolder text.

2. Where we want to refer to a single key such as "Return" or "Extra", we print them inside square brackets. Therefore "Type **DIR [RETURN]***" means to type the letters D, I and R, followed by the large "Return" key. The Set and Reset keys on either side of the space-bar we refer to as* **[+]** *and* **[–]**.

3. Many keyboard effects require the use of the "Shift", "Alt" and "Extra" keys in conjunction with another key. We represent this with a lightly-printed plus-sign. So "Type **[ALT]+P***" means to hold down the "Alt" key and type the letter P. The use of "Shift" however is normally obvious and will be ignored. For example we would refer to the* **[f8]** *key rather than to* **[Shift]+[f7]**.

Using phrases

LocoScript has a quick and handy way to save you typing out regularly used phrases again and again – you can save up to 26 short phrases so that at a single keystroke the words are automatically typed for you.

To set this up, first type the phrase normally into a document as you are editing. Place the cursor at the start of the phrase, and press **[COPY]**. Move the cursor to the end of the phrase, press **[CUT]**, and choose a letter (A to Z) to store the phrase by. To insert the phrase later on in the document, type **[PASTE]** followed by the phrase's reference letter.

You can go on using the same set of defined phrases in any document you edit during a given session with the PCW. If you want to turn off the machine but still use the same phrases when you next edit a document, then you will have to save them. To do this, select the "Save all phrases" option from the "Blocks" menu **[f8]** while editing any document. This creates a file PHRASES.STD in the first group on the M: disc. Now replace the PHRASES.STD file on your start-of-day disc with this new version using the Copy command **[f3]**, and these new phrases will be available whenever you start up LocoScript using that disc.

Making up a NewWord boot disc

NewWord is a word processing package that is becoming increasingly popular with PCW owners. Although it comes with a very meaty manual, this doesn't in fact address Amstrad specifics at all, and the additional sheet and READ-ME file that NewStar distribute are only of limited help. One of the most useful things to do is to make up a disc so that NewWord will automatically start when CP/M is booted up.

There's an easy bit and a hard bit to this. First the easy parts:

► Find a blank side of a single density floppy disc, and using PIP copy from your CP/M master disc onto your blank disc the files J14CPM3.EMS, PIP.COM, SUBMIT.COM, SETKEYS.COM, and KEYS.WP.

► Copy from the NewWord delivery disc the files NW.COM, NW.OVR and NWMSGS.OVR.

Now for the hard bit. There isn't enough room to store the final file that NewWord requires, NWPRINT.OVR, without first "installing it" for the PCW. This allows most of the file to be discarded since some parts are irrelevant to the Amstrad. Here's what you do.

► Copy from the NewWord delivery disc to the M drive the files NWPRMAKE.COM and NWPRINT.OVR.

► Type **M:** to set the default drive to M:, and type **NWPRMAKE NWPRINT.OVR**.

► You will see a host of names of printers on the screen, and although none of the options mention Amstrad or PCW, the right one is number 7 (unless you are using a different printer). Press **7 [RETURN]**.

► Now copy NWPRINT.OVR from M: onto your boot disc.

► Finally, you have to create a file to tell CP/M what to do when it starts up. Put your boot disc in the A: drive and run NewWord from it by typing **NW**. As described in the NewWord delivery sheet, create a non-document file (type **N**) called PROFILE.SUB with the following lines in it:

```
SETKEYS KEYS.WP
PIP
<M:=NW.COM
<M:=NW.OVR
<M:=NWMSGS.OVR
<M:=NWPRINT.OVR
<
M:
NW
<LA
```

Make sure that the last line ends with a **[RETURN]**, and finish editing. Note the trick in the last line: because of the way SUBMIT files work, **LA** is passed through to NewWord as the first command to run, so it automatically changes the logged drive to A, where your data files are. (If you have an 8512 you might prefer to make the B drive the default drive by substituting **<LB**.)

You can take this further and add other initialisation commands of your own at the end of PROFILE.SUB, each line preceded by the < symbol. However, if you're doing a lot of initialisation commands you ought to try and customise your NewWord permanently using the NWINSTAL program – more of this below, and in the NewWord manual.

Now with your boot disc in the A drive, if you reset the PCW with **[SHIFT]+[EXTRA]+[EXIT]**, NewWord will automatically start up and run from the M drive, but use A as the drive on which files are saved.

You will notice that when running NewWord as it is delivered that you cannot change the logged disc drive to M. This is because it comes pre-installed without M declared as a legal drive (the reason being to prevent you holding data files on M). If you want to override this, it can be done fairly easily by "re-installing" the program.

To do this, first of all ensure that you have the NewWord files on your M disc and that M is your default drive (i.e. the CP/M prompt is "M>"). Now put your NewWord master disc in the A drive, and type **A:NWINSTAL [RETURN]**. The name of the file you need to install is **NW.COM**, and the file to hold the new version to is also **NW.COM**.

At the first options menu you see, type **C** for "Computer related items", and then **A** at the next menu for "Install legal drives". Now follow the screen prompts to declare all three of A, B and M as legal drives – drives A and B are "removable", and M is "fixed". Exit back through all the menus, and test out your change by running NewWord. When you are sure everything is OK, you can copy the amended NW.COM file to your boot disc, and that will make your changes permanent.

```
                    SYSTEM INSTALLATION MENU

A  Install legal drives                 F  Install for shared-file system
B  Install alt. user # for overlays     G  Install for single-user TurboDOS
C  Install for single-user CP/M         H  Install for multi-user TurboDOS
D  Install for MP/M II                  I  Let second user view document? Y/N
E  Install for CCP/M 816

J  Help with current menu               X  Return to Main Menu

What is your choice? A

The drives that Newword can currently use are...
   Fixed:
Removable: A
Do you want to change this? Y/N
```

▲ To allow NewWord to recognise drive M, select option A from the System Installation Menu.

▼ That produces this screen. Using our method, the order in which you specify the drives is not important.

```
Enter the letters (A-P) that are valid drives on your system.  The first
drive you specify will be used as the default drive.  You will also be
asked if each drive has a removable disk (as opposed to fixed).

Drive? (A-P, or RETURN when done) A
Is this disk removable? Y/N Y

Drive? (A-P, or RETURN when done) B
Is this disk removable? Y/N Y

Drive? (A-P, or RETURN when done) M
Is this disk removable? Y/N N

Drive? (A-P, or RETURN when done)

The drives that Newword can currently use are...
   Fixed: M
Removable: A B
Do you want to change this? Y/N
```

Mysterious happenings inside PIP

Most of the utilities that come free with CP/M such as PIP, SUBMIT and so on are not renowned for being overly helpful when things go wrong.

Suppose you want to use PIP to transfer a single file from drive A: to drive B:. As you well know, you type

PIP B:=A:MYFILE.DOC

cross your fingers and hope everything goes smoothly. But if it doesn't, you'll probably never work out what has gone wrong by reading the error messages that CP/M produces. Here are some of them explained in human being-style terms:

ERROR: DISK WRITE NO DATA BLOCK - B:MYFILE.$$$
means that the destination disc B: is is full, and doesn't have enough room for the new file.

ERROR: MAKE FILE R/O DISC - B:MYFILE.$$$
means that the write protect tabs are activated on the B: disc. Take the disc out, unprotect it and try again.

ERROR: OPEN FILE NONRECOVERABLE - B:MYFILE.DOC
ERROR: OPEN FILE INVALID DISC SELECT - B:MYFILE.DOC
both these mean that either you haven't got a disc in the disc drive (idiot!), or the disc is unformatted or has been corrupted. You can format the disc using DISCKIT, but this will erase anything already on it.

Problems with DISCKIT

Copying discs with the aid of DISKCIT is kids' stuff, so (naturally) it can be rather boring!

Imagine that you are running a large application from a full RAM disc (drive M) with your priceless new data safely on one of the floppy discs, A or B. The time has come to make a backup copy, so you leave the application in the approved manner, write-protect your data disc and run DISCKIT from a CP/M system disc containing DISCKIT.COM.

Following the instructions on the screen, everything goes as you expect until you eventually press **Y** to go ahead with the copy. Then a message appears on the screen "Copying in 20 parts" (if you are copying a double density disc in B) – yes, two-zero parts, which is a gentle way of breaking the news to you that you are in for FORTY disc changes.

This is caused by a "feature" in DISCKIT that it uses the M drive as temporary storage while copying discs. Therefore, if there's not much room on your M drive the copying process will be in several parts. So for best effect, M must be empty before copying discs, or you're in for a lot of disc swapping.

If you find yourself faced with the "copying in 20 parts" message, you can break out of DISCKIT; at the stage that it says "press Y to continue", remove all discs from the drives, and press **Y**. Then an error message appears saying that the drives are empty and asking you to "R-etry or C-ancel?". Press **C** for cancel, and the process is aborted. Now you can exit from DISCKIT normally, clear out your M drive and start over. Now, with a clear RAM disc, you will see, "Copying in 2 parts" – so you might reach the pub before closing time after all!

A different way of using letter templates

You will by now have discovered that you need several different headings for writing paper, depending on whether you are writing to your mum, your bank manager, or whoever.

You have probably set up various TEMPLATE.STDs and alternative layouts in different LocoScript groups to suit all your needs, but there are other ways of storing templates that are more economical on space and possibly easier to use. You could set up headers for letters using the "Edit Header" option from the "Modes" menu [f7] – but don't – it wastes paper and a large blank area at the top of following pages looks wrong. Try this technique first:

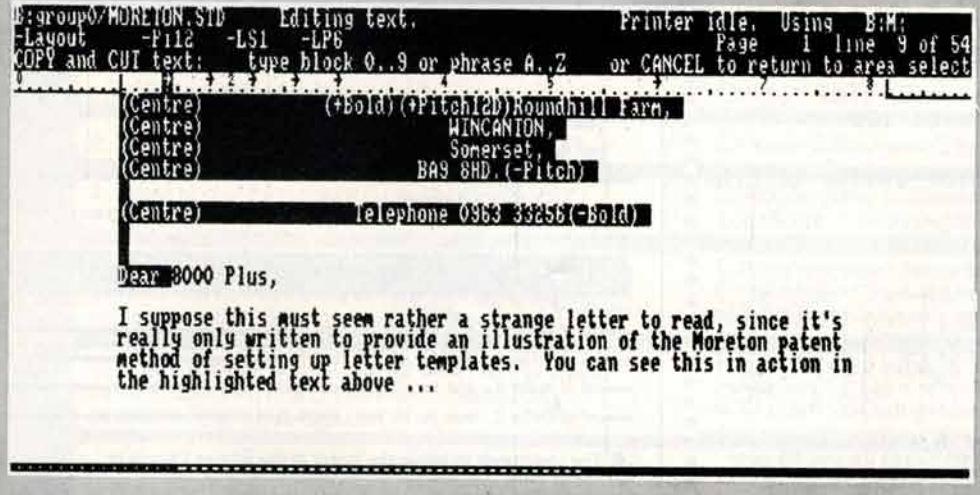
Firstly, create a letter exactly as you want it, headings and all. Now, while editing it press **[ALT]+[PAGE]** (to take the cursor to the top of the page), **[COPY]**, then **[EOL]** repeatedly until you have highlighted the area of the letterhead that you will want to re-use in other letters.

Press **[COPY]** and then a letter from A to Z by which you wish to store the template, like "F" for "Family" letters. What has happened is that your whole heading has been saved as a LocoScript *phrase*, and to re-use it in other letters you just type **[PASTE]** followed by the letter it is stored by (F, as we used) at the top of the new letter.

When you create a letter, you are first faced with the contents of the document TEMPLATE.STD of the current group. If you are using this phrase template method, you will need to totally clear your template file to give yourself a clear work page at the start: to do this, edit the template file normally, type **[CUT]** at the top, move to the bottom, **[CUT]** again to delete it all, and then save it normally.

A final note: as explained in the tip titled "Using Phrases", you'll have to store your new PHRASES.STD document on your startup disc so that you can still use it next time you start LocoScript from cold.

(Thanks to JOHN MORETON for both this tip and those entitled 'Stopping a Printout' and 'Problems with Disckit'. He would have won our fabulous tip-of-the-month prize, except it doesn't come into operation until issue 2!)



▲ How the screen should look when you CUT the letter heading for storing as a Phrase – the highlighted area can then be pasted instantly into future letters.

Command line editing

The PCW has a way to allow you to edit the previous command line that you typed in CP/M. This is very useful if you mistyped a long command since it saves alot of retyping.

At the CP/M "A>" command prompt, and even in some programs like PIP, if you press the **[PASTE]** key, the last line you typed will appear with the cursor at the end of it. Then you can use the cursor left and right keys and the two delete keys to edit the line. Press **[RETURN]** to run the amended command when the line looks correct, and if it's still wrong you can use **[PASTE]** again to repeat the process.

Stopping a printout

Have you ever been in the position when you've finished a LocoScript edit with the "Save and Print" option, only to realise too late that the document is still wrong, and you have to sit and wait while 37 useless pages churn out?

In case you haven't mastered the ins and out of the printer, then there is a way to cancel printing very fast. From anywhere in LocoScript, just press **[PTR]**, then **[f7]** (for "Reset"), then **[ENTER]** to confirm. Finally, of course, **[EXIT]** to leave the printer menu.

Foot trouble

Although the current version of LocoScript (version 1.2) has fixed many of the old bugs in using headers and footers, there are still many frustrating pitfalls for the unwary. Here's a word of advice if you are wondering why you can't get footers to appear properly.

If you choose the option of having the header and footer on page 1 different to all the other pages, then the footer will not in fact appear unless there is a second page to print. So, to get a footer at the bottom of a single page document, either set the header/footer pagination to "All pages the same", or finish your document with **[ALT]+[RETURN]** to force a second page into existence.

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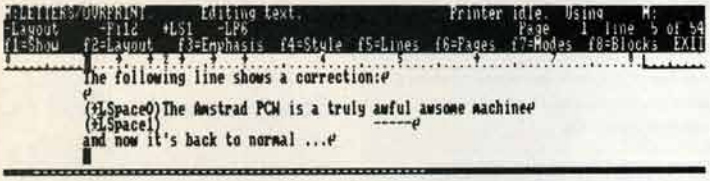
Overprinting

One feature that LocoScript lacks is a backspace facility to allow you to create composite characters by overprinting on the printer. However, there is a way round this, albeit longwinded.

The solution is to put the characters you want to superimpose on separate lines one below the other on the screen while editing your document, and set the line spacing to zero between those lines. Here's an example: suppose you want to show a word having been crossed out with hyphens.

(1) Make sure you are not using proportional spacing – change to 12 pitch if you are.
(2) Type the basic line of text and press [Return].
(3) Type the strike out hyphens on the next line down, in the same columns as the characters that they are to cross out in the line above.
(4) At the start of your basic text line, set the line spacing to 0.
(5) At the start of the hyphen line, set the line spacing back to 1 (or whatever it was originally).
(6) Carry on using LocoScript as normal



● **How the LocoScript screen should look (showing both "Codes" and "Effectors").**

```
The following line shows a correction:

The Amstrad PCW is a truly awful awsome machine
and now it's back to normal ...
```

● **The printed result.**

Two jobs at once

The PCW has several pairs of hands – you can print a file from Locoscript at the same time as editing another. But you can go further than this; if you're editing a long file, you might want to print another file without having to save your current edit and restart all over again.

While editing your file, press the **[f7]** key and select the "Disc management" menu option. The editing screen will vanish and you will see the same file directory screen as when you aren't editing a file. Now you can print, move and delete files in the normal way. To get back to your edit, just press **[EXIT]**. This might come in handy if you realise while editing that your disc is full and you want to make some space to save your edit. Go to the disc manager and move enough files from the floppy disc to the M: disc to make space. When you've saved the edit you can juggle the files around onto fresh discs.

Typing ahead

If you're working with documents of five pages or more in LocoScript, you will by now have discovered that it takes a long time to scroll from the start to the end if you want to add some text at the bottom. There's a new version of LocoScript due out soon which will avoid this, but you can still partly get round it now.

The PCW stores up keystrokes if you get ahead of it – this is called a "type-ahead" facility. So if you want to get to page 13 of a 20 page document, just type **[PAGE]** 12 times in quick succession (12 not 13, because you start on page 1, not page 0!). OK, this doesn't get you there any faster, but at least you can go away and make a cup of tea while the PCW does it all for you.

You can use the same principle in many other parts of LocoScript. For example, wherever there are sequences of menus you go through regularly, you can can type the relevant sequence of key-strokes all at once without actually waiting for the relevant menus to show on screen.

Using foreign characters

Maybe you're having trouble writing to your pen pals in Outer Mongolia. Here's a quick guide to using accented foreign characters on your PCW.

Look on page 10 of the LocoScript manual – you will see three diagrams. The bottom one shows the characters you get by holding [EXTRA] down and then pressing each key. The keys that are ordinarily the number keys (1 to 0) show a selection of accent marks, accute, grave, umlaut, circumflex etc. To get an accented character, first type the accent (e.g. **[EXTRA]** + **6** for acute); the cursor will not move on a column on the screen like it normally does. Now type the character (e.g. 'e'), and you will see it properly printed on the screen. It can be deleted, moved and printed like any normal character. Note that c-cedilla has a key all to itself, [ALT] + [comma].

By the way, these accents are only available in Locoscript, not in other word-processors you might have such as Wordstar or NewWord.

Business stationery

You're running a small business and you use your PCW to produce letters with, but you don't have any preprinted stationery. How do you make letters look a bit snazzier just using Locoscript and the PCW printer? Here are a few ideas involving some use of headers and footers, and changes of print size. If you aren't familiar with altering these settings, don't worry – read our upcoming LocoScript features.

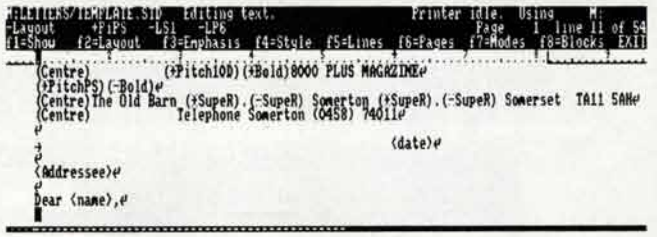
At the top of the page:

● Use bold, double width printing for your company name, and centre the text too

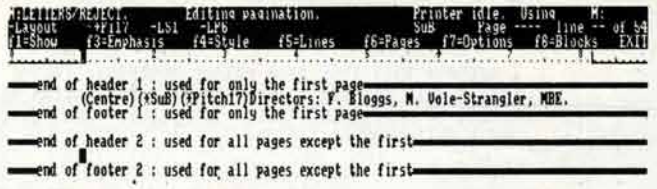
● Print your address centred all on one line below the company name, using superscripted full stops as bullet-type separators

At the bottom of the page:

● Put your registered address, or owner's name, in the footer of the first page of the letter. Do this by altering the template so that the footer for the first page is set to be different from all the other pages, and then put the names in the footer section of "first page only" of the template. Also, you could print this text in 17 pitch subscript type to make it smaller, as is common on business stationery.



● The template for the letter heading showing Codes and Effectors.



● The commands to set up the footer in the Editing Pagination screen. (Codes and Effectors are switched on).

8000 PLUS MAGAZINE

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18th September 1986

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Anne Derson

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● The final letter printed out.

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Address .....

.....

Age ..... ☐Male ☐Female

Occupation .....

1. Which computer(s) do you own?	☐8256 ☐8512 ☐Other .....
2. Do you use your PCW at home or for business?	☐Home ☐Business ☐Both
3. What kind of things do you usually do with your PCW?	☐Programming ☐Games Playing ☐Using LocoScript ☐Running other packages
4. What software do you own for the PCW? (If you don't own the relevant software, but are thinking of buying it, please put a CROSS in the box instead of a tick.)	☐Word processor (other than LocoScript) ☐Database ☐Spreadsheet ☐Accounts package ☐Programming tools ☐Games
5. What hardware do you own for the PCW? (If you're thinking of buying one of these items please put a CROSS in the relevant box.)	☐Serial/Parallel interface ☐Modem ☐Different printer
6. What computer magazines do you read (both general and Amstrad-specific ones)? Please rate each one out of 5, depending on how much you like it.	..... (Mark ...../5) ..... (Mark ...../5) ..... (Mark ...../5)
7. How did you first come to know about 8000 Plus?	☐Ad. in The Guardian ☐Ad. in the Daily Telegraph ☐Announcement in Amstrad Action ☐Saw it on a newsstand ☐Personal Mailshot ☐Other
8. Were you particularly interested by the PC Plus supplement?	☐Yes ☐No
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